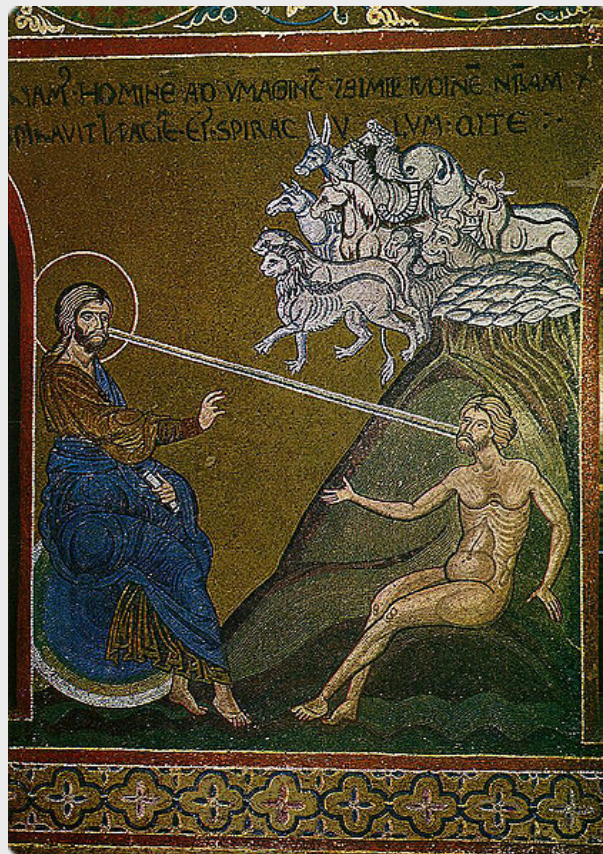


# Participatio

Journal of the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship

## Volume 9 (2021): Theological Anthropology



PHOTOGRAPH: CREATION OF ADAM, MOSAIC FROM THE MONREALE CATHEDRAL, SICILY, 12TH CENTURY. Inscription: "*Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostrum et inspiravit in faciem eius spiraculu vitae*" ("Let us make man in our own image and likeness; and he breathed into him the breath of life").

# ***Participatio: The Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship***

*Participatio* is an annual, peer-reviewed, open access journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship ([tftorrance.org](http://tftorrance.org)), a research fellowship within the Christian Church and tradition based on the theology of Thomas F. Torrance. The journal's mission is two-fold: to apprehend the significance of Torrance's work and to advance his evangelical and scientific theology for the benefit of the Church, academy, and society. Researchers interested in engaging the theology of T. F. Torrance may submit manuscripts in accordance with the policies specified below. Contributions from diverse disciplines and perspectives will be encouraged to explore the wide-ranging significance of Torrance's legacy. Occasional miscellaneous issues will include paper presentations and responses from the annual conference, book reviews, etc. For more information see [participatio.org](http://participatio.org). ISSN: 1932-9571

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## EDITORIAL

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What does it mean to be human, in light of Christ and what he has done, is doing, and will do for us? These are questions theology must answer. A variety of answers are given across the Christian tradition. Based upon a reading of Romans 5 (and other texts) we have to first say that being human is about Christ more than it is about you and me. What it means to be human does not start with looking at you, or me, or any other human, or even all humans that have ever existed. That is not the Christian way. Rather, it starts with looking at Jesus Christ, the one true human. Christ did not just save us in a narrow vacuum; he came and showed us what it looks like to be a real human person. In short, *Christ* is what it means to be human: we find our identity in him.

Humans are created in a special sense, as Genesis 1:27 makes clear, but because the *imago Dei* is ultimately centered in Christ — he is the true Image of God — only in Christ can other humans be fully *personal*. Further, Christ is central to creation as a whole, not simply to humanity. Christ came to reconcile *all things* to God. Others speak of this as the *Great Exchange*, whereby Christ takes our poverty and gives us his riches. He takes our lowly place to give us his exalted place. And as C. S. Lewis reminds us, this is *glorious*. But great glory comes with great

Myk Habets and Geordie W. Ziegler, "Editorial," *Participatio* 9, "Theological Anthropology" (2021): 1-6.  
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responsibility, something Lewis called the *weight of glory*. In 1942 Lewis preached a sermon in which he said:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship ... There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal ... But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit — immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas F. Torrance would have agreed with Lewis on this point. Considering this, our calling as humans reconciled to God and as those being conformed to the image of Christ is to live as *priests* — priests of creation: those who represent the people and all the cosmos to God. As priests of all creation, our job is to intercede for others, to represent them, to stand in for them. And that compels us into activism of all stripes, into advocacy work, ethics, politics, and prayer. As priests of creation under the weight of glory, it is our responsibility to pray for those who can't or won't, to intercede for the vulnerable and oppressed, and to lead others in prayers of praise, petition, thanksgiving, and worship to the triune God of grace and glory. At this time, amidst the significant needs of our world, may we intercede more, pray more, and be agents of reconciliation even more.

Recent attention has been paid to the theological anthropology of Thomas F. Torrance, especially two monographs, one published in 2021 and another in 2022. Hakbong Kim's work brings Torrance's theology into dialogue with social trinitarianism, highlighting the ways in which Torrance's theology is practical and has a robust theological anthropology, but it is *not* a species of social trinitarianism.<sup>2</sup> Kim pays close attention to what Torrance means by onto-relational concepts of persons, both divine and human. Jürgen Moltmann, John Zizioulas, and Miroslav Volf come in for special attention vis-a vis the theology of Torrance. Kim

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<sup>1</sup> Clive S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces* (London: Fontana, 1965), 109.

<sup>2</sup> Hakbong Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ: Christocentric Anthropology and Ethics in Thomas F. Torrance* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021).

finds Torrance's theology more creedal, orthodox, and practical than the social trinitarians. Kim also examines the implications of theological anthropology for Torrance, pressing into ethical issues that Torrance raises such as gender egalitarianism, sexual ethics, abortion and medical ethics, and environmental ethics. Beyond these christologically-focused issues, Kim's work briefly considers Torrance's ecclesiology and how his anthropology is worked out in that sphere. While Kim ultimately finds Torrance's work suggestive and foundational, it does not yet do the wider and deeper work a practical theology has to do. Kim calls for others to take up that mantle and build on Torrance's foundational work.

The more comprehensive work on Torrance's theological anthropology comes from Chris Woznicki.<sup>3</sup> Torrance's theology was some of the most trinitarian and christological of the modern era. He adapted a scientific theological method and applied that to a range of theological loci and produced a vast amount of stunning theological work across a range of topics. Early secondary work on Torrance was focused on his interaction with science and dualisms, the next wave of work looked at his theological methodology. Only more recently have monographs appeared that have looked at specific theological topics. Anthropology has not been dealt with in a sustained published monograph (although there are some theses) until Kim's work. Torrance's christological anthropology is both traditional and unique at the same time and warrants close study and wide publicity. Woznicki's monograph does well to touch on a lacuna in secondary work on Torrance. Additionally, Woznicki goes beyond Torrance and answers the question as to where the trajectory of his thought may have taken him, given more recent advances in the areas of anthropology, science, philosophy, and morality.

Woznicki assumes that there is not a developed theological anthropology in Torrance's corpus. We think that is possibly an overstatement. Torrance hardly ever collects his thoughts on a topic into one comprehensive and coherent place — the doctrine of the Trinity would be one of a few exceptions, with his two works *The Trinitarian Faith* and *The Christian Doctrine of God*. Much of Torrance's anthropology is "disguised" as Christology, to the point where it is not untrue to say that

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher G. Woznicki, *T. F. Torrance's Christological Anthropology: Discerning Humanity in Christ* (London: Routledge: 2022).

Christology *is* Torrance's anthropology: in Christ's ascension humanity is ascended, Christ's exercise of his will now is the definition of what a human free will looks like, and so forth. So, to suggest there is a lack of developed anthropology in Torrance is a stretch. It is there, but it is disparate and hidden in Christology. We do fully agree with Woznicki, however, in that bringing his anthropology together into a coherent and comprehensive form and then interrogating it for its promise is useful and important. Bringing that work into dialogue with recent treatments of anthropology and related fields is important too. What is under-developed in Torrance's work is the ontological status of humanity. It seems that Torrance holds to a Platonic-like ideal form of humanity (what Woznicki calls an *abstract universal*), which Christ assumes at the Incarnation, and this in part explains his rejection of all forms of nominalism. That has not been sufficiently appreciated, discussed, or developed. Woznicki's work alerts us to many of these themes and charts a certain response to them along analytic lines.

This special volume of *Participatio* continues the dialogue initiated by Kim and Woznicki, and others before them who have touched on Torrance's theological anthropology. Key themes such as Christology and the Trinity are integrated with practical issues. Creator and creation are kept in view as Torrance's holistic theology is brought to bear upon issues having to do with what it means to be human and what it means to be human at this point in time. It is hoped that the work of Kim, Woznicki, and the contributions to this volume will stimulate more interest in Torrance's theological anthropology and will inspire more critically reflective theological work on the issues facing humanity today.

In the opening essay, David W. Torrance offers a brother's reflections on the life and influence of Thomas F. Torrance. A biographical reflection from one who knew him intimately is a fitting way for a volume on Torrance's anthropology to begin.

Hakbong Kim contributes an essay to this volume which explores some of the key characteristics of Torrance's theological anthropology. After a historical review of the Greek, Roman, and Hebrew conceptions of what it means to be human, Kim displays the way Torrance's anthropology is grounded in "the relational imago Dei" and the concept of "the personalising person of Christ." Kim closes his essay with



an exposition of Torrance's onto-relational understanding of humanity as persons in relation, arguing that Torrance's anthropology is thoroughly relation-centered, christocentric, and trinitarian.

Daniel Cameron's essay focuses on Torrance's argument that Jesus' assumption of a fallen human nature in the Incarnation is essential to the recreation and personalization of our humanity. Cameron seeks to bring clarity to an often-muddled debate by carefully defining the language involved: what is the nature of our sin problem? what does it mean for Jesus to assume a fallen human nature? Once this important groundwork is laid, Cameron goes on to show how Torrance's framework brings together Incarnation and Atonement in such a way that a real recreation of our humanity is effected through a personalizing union with Christ.

Marty Folsom's essay on Torrance and personalism seeks to distinguish Torrance's project from historical forms of personalism while at the same time showing the ways in which Torrance drew upon the scientific and philosophical insights of John Macmurray and Michael Polanyi. Folsom then suggests a way forward for a trinitarian, scientific, personalistic anthropology, grounded in Jesus Christ as the "Personalising Person." Such a dynamic, relational, and christologically centered anthropology is a rich resource for the flourishing of the church and the world.

Gary Deddo offers an essay that shows the continuity and development of Torrance's thought in one of his most astute interpreters as it has to do with anthropology, namely, Ray Anderson of Fuller Theological Seminary. In Anderson's work, which draws explicitly upon Torrance's theological anthropology, we see a critical response to many of the real-life and practical issues facing Christians in the modern West. Torrance was often accused of not having a practical theology; Deddo shows how, in the hands of his interpreters, his work is loaded with practical theological insight.

The essay by Paul Metzger extends the discussion initiated by Deddo into racial reconciliation. By adopting insights from Torrance's responses to anti-Semitism and Apartheid, Metzger brings Torrance's theological anthropology into

dialogue with contemporary racial issues, especially insights offered by theological social commentators such as James Cone and Willie Jennings. As with other contributors, Torrance's notion of Christ as the humanizing human and the personalizing person come to the fore in Metzger's work.

Closing out the volume is the work of Geordie Ziegler who continues to elaborate on his thesis that grace is the scaffolding concept for Torrance's theology, including a theological anthropology. Clarifying what Torrance means by the analogy of grace, Ziegler adds his voice to that of others in this volume who see in Torrance's theological anthropology resources for a practical theology that can address some of the pressing issues facing Christians today. The concept of the *imago Dei* finds a central place in this discussion as a christological and eschatological concept that is more of a verb than it is noun.

Torrance's theological anthropology is comprehensive and profound, and as the contributors to this volume highlight, his work can be helpfully retrieved and reappropriated today in diverse contexts. It is hoped that the essays in this volume stimulate further work on Torrance's anthropology and the implications this has for a wider and deeper conversation at the intersection of theology and public discourse.

**THOMAS FORSYTH TORRANCE:**

**Reflections of a Brother**

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**Abstract:** *My brother Tom and I enjoyed a long and close friendship and I think it is important that in any study of a person an accurate picture of them is required. It is for this reason that I offer the following brief biographical sketch of aspects of my brother's life, motivations, and career. I focus on two aspects of Tom's life, his family background which was such an important backdrop to his life and work, followed by some more personal reflections of Tom from his younger brother. It is my hope that this insight into Tom the man, the brother, son, and husband will be a fitting complement to what most people know of Tom the scholar from his published works. Tom would not have liked the attention he has garnered since his death and so on his behalf I would make a plea that the attention not be on Tom himself, but on the gracious God he served throughout his long and fruitful life.<sup>1</sup>*

David W. Torrance, "Thomas Forsyth Torrance: Reflections of a Brother," *Participatio* 9, "Theological Anthropology" (2021): 7-29. CC-by-nc-sa. #2021-DWT-1.

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this essay have been adapted and updated from an earlier essay, "Thomas Forsyth Torrance: Minister of the Gospel, Pastor, and Evangelical Theologian," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 1–30.

## **Part 1: Family Background**

My brother Tom passed on to be with the Lord on 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2007 and I still miss him. I miss his cheerful welcome when I called at his home or when I telephoned him. I miss our many conversations when we talked about the ordinary things of life, the spiritual and physical welfare of the family, the issues confronting the world and our nation, the witness of the Church and world mission, theology.

To understand something of Tom, what he meant as a brother, family man, minister of the Gospel, theologian, it is helpful to say something about our parents. Both of them had a profound influence on his life and the lives of every member of our family.

My father, Thomas Torrance, was born in Scotland at Muirhead Farm, Harthill in the Parish of Shotts. Grandfather was a dairy farmer. The family church where Father was baptized and in which he grew up was the Kirk of Shotts, a Presbyterian church which has witnessed some of the greatest revivals in Scotland. As a young man, Father came to a personal faith in the Lord through the ministry of a neighboring Congregational minister, the Rev. Mr. Shaw, for whom he had always a great affection. He declined however to leave the Church of Scotland. Father felt the call to the ministry and to the mission-field, having been much impressed by the work of David Livingstone, who came from the neighboring parish.

Grandfather was a deeply religious person and possessed his own theological library. He was willing to support his son financially if he entered the ministry of the Church of Scotland, in Scotland, but declined to help him if he pursued a missionary calling. This meant that Father was thrown back on his faith in God and on his own initiative. Although at that time the Free Church of Scotland was deeply involved in missionary work in Africa and India my father, in his faithful commitment to the Church of Scotland, unlike several of his would-be missionary friends, declined to join in the Foreign Mission activity of the Free Church of Scotland. Accordingly, he had to look further afield in order to pursue his calling. After studying at Hulme Cliff College near Sheffield, and Livingstone College, London, Father sailed for China in 1895 under the auspices of the China Inland Mission (CIM). He arrived in Shanghai on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1896, aged 24.

Father, after language study in the CIM language training centre, was stationed in Chengdu, West China. In those days, the journey up the river Yangtze from Shanghai to Chengdu, by river steamer and sampan took nine weeks. Very quickly, he gained a remarkable mastery of the Chinese language. He threw himself into the work of evangelism, which continued to be his passion for the rest of his life. At the same time Father studied the history of China, translated some of the ancient Chinese classics, became interested in the topography of the land, was given permission to enter some of the ancient tombs, helped to found the West China University Museum, and became among other things, a proficient ceramic scholar.

Father always believed that Christ's love and offer of salvation was for the whole world. He did not adhere to the doctrine which for so long gripped the Church in Scotland, that Christ died only for the elect. One day I entered the room where Dad was working. He was sitting at his desk. He was writing and his back was toward me. I asked him, "Dad, what is limited atonement?" He looked around briefly and said, "A damned heresy" and went on writing. I never forgot his reply. I was probably fourteen years of age, and it was the only occasion when I ever heard him use a strong word. Both my father and mother were totally committed to the view that the offer of Christ's salvation was for the whole world. It undergirded all their missionary and evangelistic activity. Tom and the family followed our parents' teaching and always believed that Christ's offer of salvation was for the whole world.

My mother, Annie Elizabeth Sharpe, was born in England. Mother's family were nominally Anglican, so although she attended a Methodist school, she was confirmed into the Anglican Church in her teens. When she left school, she went to stay with her cousins in Bromley, Kent, and through their influence was converted to Christ. Her cousins had joined the Methodist Church and were associated with the YMCA in Bromley. Through these contacts, Mother was exposed to a wide variety of Christian preachers including the Rev. F. B. Meyer, and the Rev. Samuel Wilkinson, founder of the Mildmay Mission to the Jews and a friend of Hudson Taylor. This enhanced a growing desire to serve the Lord full time as the only way to express her gratitude for all that the Lord meant to her. Mother felt a strong call to

serve the Lord in China. She was impressed by hearing a London Missionary Society lady missionary from South China, and Dr. Gratten Guinness, and reading a book by Geraldine Guinness (later Mrs. Howard Taylor) written after her visit to China. My mother then went to study at the Redcliffe Training home for missionaries and home-Christian workers, in Chelsea. Then she went to the CIM's training home for a year, before sailing to China, arriving in Shanghai in 1907 aged 24. After language school she was stationed in Kuanshian in the Province of Sichuan some thirty miles north-west of Chengdu at the foot of the mountains bordering Tibet. She served there as a single missionary for four years. I know that Mother kept her notes on the Bible from her time at Redcliffe, which she used in teaching in China.

Father often travelled outside Chengdu in his mission work and often called in to the outlying mission stations. So it was that eventually, my parents met.

In 1910, Father returned to Scotland to attend the International Missionary Conference in New College, Edinburgh. This for him was a turning point. Early in 1911, he returned to China in order to take over the Sichuan agency of the American Bible Society, based in Chengdu, and marry my mother.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 1911 my parents were married in Shanghai. The marriage was a very happy one. Spiritually, biblically and theologically they were of one mind. Clearly, they were meant for each other. Ours was always a very happy home. I never ever heard either parent raise their voice in anger, quarrel or argue. We were much blessed of God.

Father's transfer to the Bible Society, which he served for 25 years, from the China Inland Mission was a happy one. It gave him more scope for his considerable energy and missionary zeal. Latterly, he represented the British and Foreign as well as the American Bible Society, not only in Chengdu, but in Chungking as well, where he was able to give assistance to the agency of the National Bible Society of Scotland.

Although continuing his scholarly pursuits into Chinese history and archaeology, he took the Gospel not only to the peoples of Western Sichuan, but to the Tribes people in the upper Min and To valleys in the Min Shan Mountains that reach toward Tibet. In particular, he took the Gospel to the Qiang (Ch'iang) peoples

of the upper Min and To Valleys. He believed they were of Semitic origin, who were there before the Han Chinese, and whom the Chinese authorities claim to be the oldest of the aboriginal "Nationalities" in China.

Father was made a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in recognition of his explorations in Sichuan and publications in several learned journals. He brought back various items for the British Museum in London and the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Always his consuming concern, however, was to help the people of West China to faith in Christ.

In his final year in China, Father and his colporteurs distributed over a million Bibles, Testaments, and portions of Scripture in western Sichuan. Throughout his ministry he had the joy of seeing several Chinese and Qiang churches established. On his retiral in 1935, Church leaders said of him that no one had done more to take the Gospel to West China and gave him several inscribed and embroidered tributes.

Both Father and Mother were much given to prayer. They dedicated each member of the family to God before we were born, praying that if the child was a boy, he would enter the ministry and if a girl, they too would serve the Lord. Mary Monlin was born on 10 May 1912 in Shanghai. The rest of us were born in Chengdu: Tom (Thomas Forsyth) on 30 August 1913, Grace Brownlee on 7 January 1915, Margaret Ramsay on 30 September 1917, James Bruce on 3 February 1923, and I, David Wishart on 22 June 1924. Ours was a very happy home. We were blessed with loving and godly parents. As it happened, the three boys entered the ministry and the three girls married ministers, two of whom with their husbands became missionaries in Africa.

Mother over the years acquired a remarkable knowledge of the Bible, as did Father, which she taught to the family. Like Father, she believed that Christ's salvation was for everyone and was totally committed to world mission. She was also a woman of prayer. With such parents no family could have been given a better spiritual start to life or been taught more of the Word of God.

No one of us can remember a time when the family did not meet together each day for family worship. Father or Mother read a portion of Scripture and, as

the family knelt, led in prayer. This practice continued through school and university, as long as the family, or some of the family, remained at home. Theirs was a living, dynamic faith, centered not on a system of belief, but on the Person of Christ. They had a deep reverence for Scripture as the Word of God. We were never taught any particular doctrine about the Bible other than that it is God's Word. We were taught that if we approach Scripture in the right way in prayer, it is the place where we will meet and encounter God, hear him speak and discern his will for our lives. In addition to reading it together, we were each encouraged to read the Bible for ourselves and read it through every year. This is a custom which we have continued for many years, often reading through the Bible twice a year.

This emphasis on the Bible as the place of encounter between man and God, and the fact that faith is not based on a system of belief but on the Person of the Living God, meant that neither Tom nor any of the family ever experienced any tension between their personal evangelical faith and their studies of philosophy, science, or theology. For that we are grateful. This is an experience which is different from that of many others from an evangelical background, where unhappily the emphasis is laid on a system of belief rather than on the Person of Christ.

Although my parents were strongly evangelical, their faith was always objectively on Christ and on what Christ has done, is doing, and will do. The emphasis was never in what we do. Mother often quoted Galatians 2 verse 20 where Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." We are redeemed by Christ's faith not by our faith. Our faith is important. It is through our faith that we receive and enjoy what Christ has done, is doing, and will do, for our salvation. Father was theologically in full agreement with my mother.

## **Part 2: Reflections of a Brother**

### **Tom's Early Years**

China was not an easy country in which to serve as a missionary. In our parents'



time, life at times was fraught with danger. For much of their time China was ruled by warlords who frequently fought with one another. Over two thousand missionaries and their families died or were martyred endeavouring to take the Gospel to China. Many times our family was in danger and survived in answer to prayer, all of which had a profound effect on each member of the family. Each member of the family was aware that we could not have survived without prayer.

Nonetheless China was a good and exciting place in which to grow up, so different from later life in Scotland.

As a boy, Tom was given the name "mischief." He was a happy boy and played many mischievous tricks on both missionaries and Chinese. He kept his sense of fun to the end.

In China the family experienced a different world. They enjoyed a freedom which they would not have had in growing up in Scotland and were able to do many things which it would not have been possible to do in Scotland. Each day they rode to school on the back of a horse or mule. Father had both a horse (Prince) and a mule (Billy). Billy was a much-loved member of the family. He would not allow a Chinaman to sit on his back presumably because at one time a Chinaman had ill-treated it. However, it loved the family and would allow all the family to ride it. Tom and my older sisters soon became very capable in riding both the horse and mule. One day a fellow missionary told my parents that Tom was seen galloping to school on the mule with his younger sister Margaret clinging on his back.

My father was a pioneer missionary to a people called the Qiang, who lived in the mountains between Sichuan and Tibet. He was the first and at the time the only European whom many villagers encountered. Tom twice, aged 13 and 14 years old, accompanied my father in his missionary expeditions to the Qiang. He listened to my father preaching, witnessing many conversions and baptisms. This made a lasting impression on him. It opened his eyes to the need for world mission and gave to him a tremendous desire to take part in world mission. For many years he wanted to be a missionary like my father, to West China.

As a young boy at school, Tom enjoyed life and did not take learning too seriously. Aged about 8 or 9, one day he ran away from school. His teacher

complained to my mother and asked Tom to say the two times two table. Tom said later that he had deliberately misled them by saying it incorrectly. The teacher stamped her foot and said that Tom was stupid. Hence mother felt that as far as academic lessons were concerned perhaps her son was stupid. She told me later that when Tom was in high school and at university, she could not understand why he should be given academic awards when he was supposed to be stupid!

On the family's last journey down the Yangtze River on their way to Scotland, their small river boat was fired on from both sides of the river by brigands. As the family sheltered behind a steel barricade with bullets hitting the side, Tom had a fairly narrow escape and brought home at least one of the bullets. Tom was 14 years old when the family returned to Scotland.

Father, feeling that his work in China, particularly among the Qiang peoples was not finished, returned to China for seven further years until his retirement. Mother remained with the family in Scotland. The decision for Mother to remain in Scotland was in order to give the family a home and, which was the prayerful longing of both parents, to ensure that each of the family grew up to love and serve the Lord. Their faithfulness at this time, which was not easy for either parent, was rewarded. The family did grow to love and serve the Lord.

Mother ensured we write to Father every week and Father wrote personally to each of us. In our family prayers each day which Mother led, we always prayed for Father so that he did not seem far away.

Mother, like Father, had a remarkable knowledge of the Bible. Tom often called Mother the theologian of the family and Father the evangelist. Both parents read considerably. Both greatly appreciated the ministry of Robert Bruce who succeeded John Knox as minister of St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. They both appreciated his book on Holy Communion which as children we were asked to read. Other books which we were asked to read were Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, which my mother was very fond of, along with Samuel Rutherford and *Calvin's Institutes*. My brother Tom once remarked that Mother kept a copy of *Calvin's Institutes* beside her bed. Not very light reading at bedtime! My mother also introduced Tom to Karl Barth by giving him a copy of Barth's *Credo*. I read Martin

Luther's *The Bondage of Will* from Tom's library while still at school. It made a deep impression on me.

### **Tom's Education**

After leaving school, Tom proceeded to Edinburgh University to study Classics and Philosophy under Norman Kemp Smith and A. E. Taylor. His interest extended to the philosophy of science. This was an exhilarating period of his life. Because Father retired at that time and the family was short of money, Tom cut short his study of Philosophy and in 1934 went on to New College to study Divinity. In his second year there he was awarded a Blackie Travel scholarship for six months travel and study in the Middle East. Then in 1937 he gained the Bachelor of Divinity degree with Distinction in Theology, the First Cunningham Fellowship as Dux of College and the Aitkin Fellowship for post-graduate study.

Throughout his studies in the Faculty of Arts and that of Divinity, Tom took an active part in student evangelistic activities, both within the university and further afield in various towns and parishes in Scotland. Many came to faith in Christ through these activities.

The two teachers in the Divinity Faculty who exercised the most positive and lasting influence on Tom, as on many others, were Hugh Ross Mackintosh and Daniel Lamont. Both, in their own way, were leading exponents of conservative evangelical theology. For Tom their teaching had an immense appeal. Mackintosh insisted that student sermons should be expository and evangelistic — "preaching for a verdict," as he would put it. The atoning love of God was to be given central place. To speak of Christianity without mentioning the atonement, he argued, was "as inept as a sentence without a verb."

When Mackintosh first met Karl Barth in Edinburgh, the one question he asked him was about his doctrine of the atonement. For Mackintosh there must always be a close link between theology and mission and any theology which was not missionary and evangelistic in attitude was not worthy of the name. That was Tom's view.

Mackintosh opened Tom's eyes, as he opened the eyes of others, to the importance and relevance of Christian Dogmatics for the whole of the Christian life.

It also helped Tom to understand his own missionary calling and redirect it into the field of theological research and education. In his second year at New College Tom organized a missionary conference to which he brought Robert Wilder, one of the founders of the Student Volunteer Missionary Movement. Years later a friend at that conference reported hearing Wilder say to Mackintosh, "Isn't it good that Tom Torrance is going to be a missionary?" Mackintosh responded: "One of these days he will succeed me in New College."

Daniel Lamont, who lectured in apologetic and pastoral theology at New College, also exercised a deep influence on Tom. Lamont had previously been a mathematician and physicist and for a while assisted Lord Kelvin in Glasgow. He wrote among other books, *Christ in the World of Thought*,<sup>2</sup> where he endeavored to relate evangelical and christological truth to modern science. Lamont introduced Tom to the thought of Karl Heim of Tübingen. Tom was initially critical of Heim's Kantian presuppositions but years later became a member of the Karl Heim Gesellschaft. Under Daniel Lamont were laid the early foundations for much of Tom's later thinking in this important area.

In 1936 William A. Curtis, Principal of New College had asked Tom, on his receipt of a Blackie Travel Scholarship, to "shepherd" a small group of students as part of their studies in a visit to the Holy Land. Undoubtedly, Tom's early experiences in China helped him to cope with the customs and peoples in the Middle East, in circumstances which others found rather difficult. It also encouraged him, not always wisely, to venture farther afield than the others in his travels not only in the Holy Land but through Syria, Jordan, and Iraq. He had many interesting and at times dangerous experiences. On one occasion in Iraq, he was mistaken for a Jewish spy, arrested, and sentenced to death by hanging! Mercifully, he managed to persuade the authorities that he was not a spy, was sent back under guard to Baghdad, and deported to Damascus. From Syria he visited Turkey where he joined an archaeological expedition engaged in uncovering Constantine's Palace and the Church of St. Mary. After several weeks there he sailed to Athens for a period of hard study in preparation for his Bachelor of Divinity examinations. It was there in Athens that he had his first encounters with the Greek Orthodox Church. On his

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Lamont, *Christ in the World of Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1934).

way home he visited Rome and arrived back in Edinburgh in time for the examinations that summer.

When still in Syria Tom had learned that H. R. Mackintosh, his much-respected teacher had died. Tom felt devastated. He planned to specialize in Dogmatics, and had hoped to spend his third year being taught almost exclusively by Mackintosh. That was not now to be. Mackintosh had emphasized the centrality of Christology for the importance of a Dogmatics that was christologically based for the Christian life and ministry. He had also helped Tom to think in terms of his own future lying in a theological ministry in the service of the Gospel. His evangelical missionary zeal had been encouraged and was now being reshaped and refocused in a theological direction.

In 1937 Tom was licensed by the Presbytery of Edinburgh as a Probationer Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Ordination lay ahead but it would be three years before that came about.

Having been already been introduced to Barth's theology, and encouraged by H. R. Mackintosh, Tom decided to study under Barth in Basel and stayed in the *Theologisches Alumneum*, an ancient theological student house at 17 Hebelstrasse.

Barth without doubt was the greatest theologian since the Reformation and Tom was immensely impressed by his manner of teaching and by the biblical content, depth, and theological breadth of his lectures, together with his remarkable understanding of other theologians: Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, and Roman Catholic.

Professor John Baillie at New College Edinburgh recommended Tom for the chair of theology in Auburn, USA. At the age of 26 and having completed only one year of post-graduate studies in theology, Tom had to work extremely hard in order to produce lectures covering the whole range of systematic theology. He concentrated on the Doctrine of Christ, the Doctrine of the Triune God, and the Doctrine of Revelation. He gave courses on theology and philosophy, theology and science, and theology and art. And in so doing he laid the foundation for his research into and teaching of Systematic Theology at a later period. However, because of international circumstances and the imminence of war, he stayed there

only one year.

Tom's central emphasis on the saving life and Person of Christ, and of the Christian's union with Christ, created tension among some of his students. It was difficult for them to learn the lesson that only as we personally yield to Christ in faith and obedience and prayer, can we really understand Him. They felt confronted by God and challenged in their lives. Under Tom's teaching, some students in Auburn, and not a few later on in New College, were led by the Holy Spirit to commit their lives to Christ and attained peace with God.

In the spring and summer of 1939 invitations to teach came first from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago and then from Princeton University in New Jersey.

Although he would have enjoyed the challenge, particularly of Princeton, international events were moving fast. Increasingly it appeared that war between Britain and Germany was inevitable and imminent. Tom did not want to be out of his own country when it was at war. Very reluctantly he declined the invitation. He returned to the UK in the summer of 1939. His ministry thereafter lay in Scotland.

On Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, war was declared between Britain and Germany. On his return, with war being imminent but not yet declared, Tom offered to be a chaplain in the Army. To his surprise his offer was not accepted. Although he had been licensed to preach by the Church of Scotland, he had not served in a Parish and was not yet ordained as a minister of Word and Sacrament.

The autumn saw him registered as a post-graduate student at Oriel College, Oxford in order to work on his thesis for Basel. Intellectually and academically, Tom found it a very stimulating period of his life.

With his evangelical missionary zeal for the furtherance of Christ's Kingdom and the building up of his Church, Tom was anxious to experience the work of the parish ministry.

### **Tom as Parish Minister, Chaplain and Professor**

Tom was ordained and inducted to Alyth Barony Parish Church on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1940. Alyth is near the foot of Glen Isla, on the north side of

Strathmore, in Perthshire. At that time it had approximately 2500 inhabitants, situated in the midst of a large farming community.

Because of the constant threat of enemy air raids during the war, many children in Britain, for the sake of their safety, were evacuated from the cities to the country. I was the youngest of our family and over ten years younger than Tom. My parents decided that I should leave Edinburgh, and so I stayed with Tom in Perthshire for some eighteen months in 1940 and 1941. A housekeeper came in each day to cook meals for the two of us and to tidy the house. These were very happy days. I enjoyed Tom's company and believe that he enjoyed mine.

In Tom's leisure times which were not too frequent, we played chess, walked or fished the Alyth burn or the River Isla. One incident will long be remembered. In the summer of 1940 my two brothers, Tom and James, together with three farmers' sons camped for ten days at the head of Glen Isla in the Cannes Glen. We lived chiefly on trout, which were in abundant supply, and on rabbits which were numerous. Toward the end of our holiday, we were asked to move our camp site lower down the glen because of the start of deer shooting. At the end of a long and glorious day climbing and watching the deer on the steep slopes of Glen Doll, in the late evening, we packed our tents and walked down four miles to the foot of Glen Brichty. We were tired when just before midnight, with the tents pitched, the tea made but not drunk, we sat around a roaring fire. In the mountains we had for a few days forgotten about the war and regulations concerning black-out. Suddenly we heard the distinctive noise of a German plane coming up the glen. Clearly it had spotted our fire. Hurriedly our precious tea was thrown on the fire and we sat holding a blanket over the glowing embers. The plane passed over head and some moments later we heard six explosions as it dropped its bombs. They landed on the other side of the hill from us and no harm was done apart from scarring the mountain side and scaring a few deer. We were afraid to relight the fire and remembered the need for the black-out.

As a parish minister, Tom did not have much leisure time. He threw himself with great energy into the work of the parish. He was most conscientious and diligent as a minister. Always his desire was to present Christ to his people. To that end he regularly read a portion of Scripture in each home and prayed. He took

visitation and the pastoral ministry seriously. Christ was central to all his preaching. Like his mentor H. R. Mackintosh, he preached for a verdict, challenging his congregation to come to terms with the grace of God and the fruits of Christ's atonement.

After three years in parish ministry, Tom felt certain that he must serve in the British Army. Consequently, he offered his services to the Church of Scotland "Committee on Huts and Canteen Work for H. M. Forces." They provided through their chaplains, both pastoral care and practical assistance to Scottish soldiers on wartime service. A few weeks later, Tom was posted to North Africa and the Middle East.

His first assignment as chaplain was to the 41<sup>st</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. They formed part of a combined assault force planning to invade the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean, with a view to an invasion of northern Greece. These plans took Tom north to Haifa. The Germans however learned of the proposed invasion. Some four or five thousand men were lost in the initial attack and the whole project was scrapped.

During the subsequent period of inaction, Tom wrote to every home in his congregation in Alyth, in order to keep them informed about his own activities.

Major-General Denys Reid, noted for his distinguished service in a series of long-range desert patrols across North Africa, was in command of the 10<sup>th</sup> Indian Division, which was preparing to go to Italy. Reid, the son of a Church of Scotland minister in Inverness, invited Tom to come as chaplain in his Division. Tom readily agreed. Indian Divisions were made up of British and Indian troops in roughly equal numbers. Equipped with his mobile canteen truck and driver, Tom embarked a few weeks later on a small ship laden with tanks for the port of Taranto. From there he made his way to the battle line at Ortona.

His life was frequently in danger, and on several occasions, he escaped uninjured even when the soldiers next to him were killed. He remained with the Division until the German army caved in all along the Po River. In the village of Malabergo, near the Reno, the 10<sup>th</sup> Indian Division heard the "Cease Fire."

Throughout his time as chaplain, Tom found that, spiritually, his most



valuable work was in individual personal conversations, when soldiers would open up their hearts in their concern for loved ones at home. It was often then that many a soldier gave his heart to the Lord. Tom was always ready to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ, his mercy, forgiveness, salvation, and the need to commit one's life to him. The Cross and Resurrection were always central to his message. Many were glad to listen and ask questions, although naturally some were indifferent. Throughout those two years in the Army, in the Middle East and in Italy, he had the joy of seeing men being converted to Christ and growing in faith. He was awarded the M. B. E. for bravery as a chaplain.

These experiences reinforced for him the need for complete harmony between theology, preaching and daily life. In his future teaching, Tom often talked of a "paper theology," by which he meant a formal academic theology that was not really biblical or evangelical, that did not relate to the whole of life, that could not bring comfort to the dying or the living, and that was simply "man-made."

The war in Europe ended in May 1945. A day or two later, he wrote to me in India, where I was serving as a soldier in the 14<sup>th</sup> Indian Division. In that letter he expressed his thoughts and feelings. He was overwhelmed with the fact that he was still alive, and even uninjured. He believed that again and again God had given him courage and sustained him in the face of death and destruction. Like many others he felt ashamed that he was preserved while others were not. He recognised in ways that words cannot express that God had chosen to spare him for a purpose. His first desire as he said in his letter was in prayer to rededicate his life unreservedly to God and seek his will. Two months later in London, he made his way to St. Martin's in the Fields church in order, again, as he already had done in Assisi in Italy, to give thanks for his survival, to commit his life unreservedly to God, and ask what God wanted him to do.

In 1947 he was called to Beechgrove Church in Aberdeen and three years later was appointed to the Chair of History in New College Edinburgh. After two years he was appointed to the chair of Systematic Theology in New College, an appointment which he held until he retired in 1977. As was customary at that time, he always opened and closed his lectures with prayer. This was a practice which he continued until he retired.

In his distinguished academic career, Tom unfortunately was often impatient with colleagues who were liberal in theology and did not hold to his biblical position. As a result, he often antagonised some. However, with his students who entered the ministry or were missionaries abroad and those seeking to learn, he was altogether different. He was their pastor and many regarded him as their friend. He took an active pastoral interest in their work and welfare and helped them in their ministry and work. One of his students, the late Rev. Howard Taylor who had served in Africa before entering the ministry, often told me of his surprise when, after starting New College and then after the birth of their first child, the first visitor at their door was Tom. He had come to wish them every blessing in Christ.

Tom was happy for many of his students to call him Tom. Despite his many academic awards and his nine doctorates he always seemed to sit very lightly to such qualifications. Years ago, I wondered what degrees to put after his name when writing him a letter. I asked him and Tom promptly told me off. Thereafter I never in writing mentioned any of his degrees. If Tom was ever asked what he did, he always replied, "a minister of the Gospel." He baptized two of my three children. On their baptismal certificates he simply signed his name, "Tom Torrance, minister of the Gospel." My brother James baptized my third child and he too signed his name as a minister of the Gospel.

### **Tom as Husband, Father, and Brother**

In October 1946 Tom married Margaret Edith Spear, a nurse from Bath who during the war had nursed in St. Thomas's Hospital, the most-bombed hospital in London, where she had a harrowing time. They were blessed with three children, Thomas, Iain, and Alison. All three have grown up with a strong faith in God. Iain became a minister of the Church of Scotland, professor of Theology in Aberdeen and Princeton, USA. Thomas became a senior lecturer in Economics first in Aberdeen and then in Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. He is a church elder and session clerk of Whitekirk Parish in East Lothian, Scotland. Alison became a doctor and strong church worker. They have been very supportive of Tom. They are a loving united family.

As a brother, Tom was always deeply interested in my family and the families

of his siblings. He often spoke to me on the phone for over an hour and enquired after my family. I have one son, in the ministry, and two daughters who are active in church. He always enquired about each one and prayed for them every day, which I much appreciated.

### **Tom as Evangelical Churchman**

Tom was always interested and concerned in the work and witness of the church in Scotland and throughout the world. He believed that Christ demanded of the Church that in their witness, the churches should recognise their unity in Christ. He believed that this echoes our Lord's prayer in John 17.

Tom wrote extensively on the two volumes of preparatory studies for the World Council of Churches meeting in Amsterdam in 1948, and the issues raised by the Third World Conference on Faith and Order which met at Lund in August 1952, which he attended as a representative of the Church of Scotland.

As a representative of the Church of Scotland in Dialogue with the Church of England, he wrote in 1955, *Royal Priesthood*<sup>3</sup> in which he endeavored to address some of the main issues confronting union between Reformed and Episcopal Churches.

Tom believed firmly in the need for rigorous biblical theological study on the part of participants in dialogue. He believed that union whether of individuals or churches could only take place "in Christ" and on the basis of Christ's atonement. Only as churches shared together in Christ's death could they be raised together as one in Christ. Not all delegates were willing to engage in such rigorous theological study. At times Tom felt that he was somewhat of a lone voice and therefore chose to retire from some, but not all, active ecumenical engagement and endeavored to make his contribution through writing, focusing attention on the doctrines of the church, ministry, and sacraments.

A major contribution in this connection was his appointment, within the Church of Scotland, as Convener of a Special Commission on Baptism. Under his

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood*, Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers, no. 3 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1955).

leadership, the Commission surveyed the Church's understanding of Baptism from the New Testament to the present day. The final Reports were presented to the General Assemblies of 1961 and 1962.

Tom served on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches from 1952 to 1962. In 1974 he took part in the Reformed-Roman Catholic Study Commission on the Eucharist which met in the Netherlands. This preceded three important publications by The British Council of Churches Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine,<sup>4</sup> co-chaired by our brother, the Rev. Professor James Torrance, and the Orthodox theologian Costa Carras.

Probably Tom's greatest ecumenical contribution followed his visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch and other leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church on behalf of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. He had already been in conversation with the Greek Orthodox Church which had welcomed his theological involvement. Tom proposed that the churches should enter into dialogue, seeking theological consensus on the doctrine of the Trinity, for agreement there would cut behind all other disagreements. The Ecumenical Patriarch, and other Patriarchs, of the Greek Orthodox Church responded very favourably. By 1983 all fourteen Orthodox Churches became involved. After extended discussions between 1986 and 1990, an "Agreed Statement on the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity" was reached at Geneva on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1991. This was a major achievement on the part of the Churches and Tom's contribution was recognised.

Earlier in 1954 he had called for discussions within the Orthodox Communion between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian or "Monophysite" theologians. Agreement between them was eventually reached early in 1973. Tom was then invited to Addis Ababa by Methodios the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Axum, the See in Ethiopia founded by Athanasius, to join in commemorating the death of Athanasius in 373 A.D., and in celebrating the theological agreement Tom had initiated. There he was consecrated by Methodios as a Presbyter of the Greek Orthodox Church, and given the honorary title of Protopresbyter. Earlier in 1970, at

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<sup>4</sup> *The Forgotten Trinity: The Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (London: British Council of Churches, 1989), with companion *Study Guide* and *Selected Papers*; see #1989-JBT-1, #1991-JBT-1, #1989-JBT-2.

a session of the General Assembly in Edinburgh, the Patriarch of Alexandria had conferred on him the Cross of St. Mark, which was followed in 1977 by Tom's being given the Cross of Thyateira by the Greek Orthodox Archbishop in London.

An interest particularly close to his heart and one on which he lectured to post-graduate students was "Theology and Science." He has pioneered work, and written and published many books, on the relations of theology and science. In 1969 he published *Theological Science*, which was hailed by Michael Polanyi, and soon translated into French as *déjà classique*.<sup>5</sup> To Tom's joy it was also translated into Chinese.<sup>6</sup> This was followed later on by *Reality and Evangelical Theology* and *Reality and Scientific Theology*, and *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge*. In 1969 he published *Space, Time and Incarnation* and in 1976 *Space, Time and Resurrection*.<sup>7</sup>

Tom's research into and writing about theology and science brought him many invitations abroad. In 1969, he became a member and from 1972 to 1981, President, of the Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses. In 1973, he was a founder member and from 1976 to 1977, President, of the Institute of Religion and Theology of Great Britain and Ireland, and in 1976 a member of the Académie Internationale de Philosophie des Sciences. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1979, and in 1982, a Fellow of the British Academy in London. In 1970 he was awarded a D.Litt. degree on submission of five published

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Science Théologique*, ed. and trans. Jean-Yves Lacoste (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), #1990-518.

<sup>6</sup> Editorial note: *Theological Science* was twice printed in Chinese, both times in the translation by Ryan Wei, first printed in Hong Kong in 1997 and then in Beijing in 2003. See Thomas F. Torrance, *Shen xue de ke xue (Theological Science)*, trans. Ruan Wei (Xianggang: Han yu Jidu jiao wen hua yan jiu suo; Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 1997), #1997-614; and Thomas F. Torrance, *Shen xue de ke xue (Theological Science)*, trans. Ruan Wei (Beijing: Zhongguo ren min da xue chu ban she, 2003); #2003-TFT-3.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, London, 1969); *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982); *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985); *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelations of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); *Space, Time and Incarnation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); and *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1976).

works on Theological Method. In 1978, he was awarded the prestigious Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion on the basis of his writings on the interaction of science and theology. In 1983, he was honoured by Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, with an Honorary Doctor of Science for his work into the study of scientific method in the relation of science and theology.

For the year 1976-77, he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Although there are considerable restrictions imposed upon a Moderator in what they may say during their year of office, throughout Tom made clear his abiding concern for renewal in the Church through more serious biblical, theological, teaching and preaching. He wanted the Bible to be preached in the churches so that Sunday by Sunday people might hear for themselves "the living and dynamic Word of God."

His deep concerns for the Church were incorporated in a document which he wrote and was signed by a number of others in addition to himself. It was entitled, *Urgent Call to the Kirk*<sup>8</sup> and was, in 1983, sent to every minister of the Church of Scotland. The document says:

We believe that the Church of Scotland is in deep spiritual crisis. Erosion of fundamental belief has sapped its inner confidence, discarding of great Christian convictions has bereft it of vision and curtailed its mission, detachment of preaching from the control of biblical revelation has undermined its authority as the Church of Christ, neglect in teaching the truth of the Gospel has allowed the general membership to become seriously ignorant of the Christian Faith. With this loss of evangelical substance, the Kirk fails to be taken seriously ... This calls for our repentance. The hungry sheep look up and are not fed ... We call upon the Kirk to commit itself afresh to Jesus Christ and his Gospel and to carry out an evangelical rebuilding of its faith, life and mission. Jesus Christ must be brought back into the centre of the Church and all its life, thought and activity, for He is the sole source of God's incarnate self-revelation, the unique way to

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "An Urgent Call to the Kirk," privately circulated letter, 1977. Download: #1977-TFT-3.

God the Father, the only ground of salvation and the one foundation and norm of the Church. The Spirit of Jesus Christ alone can quicken and renew the Church and make it one body with Christ ... Mission and evangelism must be given priority.<sup>9</sup>

In that document, Tom clearly revealed his commitment to the spiritual renewal of the Church and his passion for Christ. To that end he had dedicated his life, his ministry, his teaching and all his biblical, theological, and scientific research.

In his concern for evangelism and the renewal of the Kirk in Scotland, Tom drew up a letter, signed by other former Moderators of the Church of Scotland inviting the evangelist Dr. Billy Graham to Scotland. This led to the all-Scotland Mission led by Billy Graham in 1990.

Tom never lost his love for China or his missionary zeal that China's millions should come to faith in Christ. He three times returned to China in 1984, in 1986, and again eight years later in 1994, visiting the places where our father worked and was born. He had the joy of meeting some who had come to faith in Christ through Father's ministry. On his second visit, he was able to hand over funds which he had raised toward the rebuilding of churches that were destroyed in the cultural revolution in China (1964-79). On his return from China in 1984, he wrote a letter to over thirty Church leaders throughout the world, to say that what China desperately needed was Bibles and pastors, and called for the funding and establishing of a printing press. To his great joy this appeal was taken up by several Bible Societies, The American Bible Society, the British and Foreign and the Scottish Bible Societies, and by Dr. Chan Young Choi of the United Bible Societies in Kowloon who won the agreement of Bishop K. H. Ting of Nanjing, and particularly by Dr. John Erickson of the United Bible Societies centered in New York. More than \$7million was raised, and an eight-acre plot of ground was purchased near Nanjing on which The Amity Printing Press was established in March 1985. Since then, over twenty million Bibles have been printed and distributed throughout China and it has become the largest printing press for Bibles in the world. Tom felt in this that he was helping to carry out in a new way the Bible Society work of Father.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., np.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland is the supreme court of the Church. It meets every year in May. In Tom's concern for the witness and outreach of the Church particularly in mission and its witness to the nation, I met with Tom every year for many years to discuss what would arise in the General Assembly. Together we agreed on various issues which we thought should be raised. Foremost in Tom's mind was world mission. He was deeply concerned with taking the Gospel to the whole world. He was always interested in China and in Israel. He believed in God's eternal covenant with Israel as God's servant and witness to the world. He was also deeply concerned about the Church's witness to the nation.

### **The Church's Witness to the nation**

Along with Lady Lothian, a devout Roman Catholic, Tom founded the Order for Christian Unity in the UK. He also, with others, was a founder of the Order for Christian Unity in Scotland. For several years he was president in Scotland and on his retiral I was appointed president. In our Scottish committee, we had members of the Church of Scotland, Episcopalians, and three very devout Catholics. The aim of the Order was to uphold the Christian faith and practice in society, education and in the home. It was in his work within the Order that Tom produced his publications on the human embryo and the unborn child.<sup>10</sup> He was always deeply concerned to uphold the teaching of the Gospel as it affected every area of life and society.

In the latter days of his life Tom was in a nursing home. The last person to attend to him was a Chinese nurse. His last conversation on earth was with her. She told the family that Tom tried to convert her and told her that if she did not commit her life to Christ she would not go to heaven. To the family it seemed singularly appropriate that his final conversation was with a Chinese nurse.

In conclusion, I quote an extract from one of Tom's prayers offered in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on 20th and 21st May 1977. They reveal his own spiritual pilgrimage and quest, and also his prayerful concern for the Church.

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<sup>10</sup> E.g., Thomas F. Torrance, *The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press for the Scottish Order of Christian Unity, 1999); and *The Being and Nature of the Unborn Child* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press for the Scottish Order of Christian Unity, 2000). See the eight related sources in the Torrance bibliography: <https://tftorrance.org/1998-625>.



Heavenly Father ... we thank Thee for our incarnate Saviour, his life on earth and his death on the Cross; we bless Thee that he interceded for us in his life and prayed for us in his death, making his soul an offering for our sin, and that he ever lives as our Mediator at thy right hand. Continue to pour out upon us, O Lord, the Spirit of thy Son, that joined to him in the life he prayed and the death which he offered on our behalf we may learn daily to pray as he prayed and live as he lived: that all we do may please Thee.

May the heavenly intercession of thy Beloved Son so prevail on behalf of thy Church that constrained by divine love it may proclaim the Gospel to all the world until every nation becomes his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth are the possession of his Kingdom. Bless with the mighty aid of thy Holy Spirit those who work to the glory of thy Name in distant lands. Give them wisdom and courage in all their difficulties, and the great joy of gathering men and women and children into the one fold of the Saviour of mankind.



## THOMAS F. TORRANCE AND THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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**Abstract:** *In the theology of Thomas F. Torrance, theological anthropology has been regarded as a minor theme. However, it is in fact significantly and consistently addressed in his various theological works. In this context, this essay explores Torrance's theological anthropology and its key characteristics. I begin by looking at Torrance's historical understanding of human beings. I then turn to his theological understanding of human beings, that is, the concept of the relational imago Dei. Finally, I consider his onto-relational understanding of human beings in the scientific and philosophical epistemologies that he utilizes. Through this investigation, the essay reveals and argues that Torrance's anthropology is a theological anthropology with a relation-centered, christocentric, and trinitarian content.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised English version of "A Study of Thomas Torrance's Theological Anthropology" (Korean) in *Mission and Theology* 55 (2021): 33-59. Used with permission.

## Introduction

In Torrance studies, anthropology is less discussed than other dogmatic themes. While numerous research projects on Torrance highlight his engagement with the natural sciences, emphasis on scientific theology, and deep theological exploration of Patristic and Reformed theology, his theological anthropology has received less notice and thus it has been regarded as only a lesser or minor theme. The *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*<sup>2</sup> reflects this tendency to some degree. The handbook comprises 18 chapters and covers the themes of Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, theological science, and eschatology, all of which have a crucial place in Torrance's theology. However, the book does not reflect the full scope and content of Torrance's anthropological understanding, leaving readers to think that his anthropology is marginal at best.

The limited attention to Torrance's theological anthropology has also caused misunderstandings of the nature of his theology. Torrance has often been critiqued by theologians, such as Colin Gunton, David Fergusson, and John Webster, for his relative deficiency of practical considerations and applications. Such critiques question whether Torrance sufficiently considers not only vertical but also horizontal facets of Christian dogmatics, i.e., anthropological, ethical, and social implications. This also calls for clear and detailed expositions of practical or horizontal implications, if indeed they exist.<sup>3</sup>

However, theological anthropology has a significant place in the theology of Torrance. It is a central theme in his early work *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*,<sup>4</sup> and he continues to explore the theme throughout his theological works, such as *Theology*

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<sup>2</sup> Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance* (New York: T&T Clark, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> In terms of the precise ways in which Torrance has been critiqued by Gunton, Fergusson, and Webster, and a possible critical response to their arguments, see Hakbong Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ: Christocentric Anthropology and Ethics in Thomas F. Torrance* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 116–123.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

*in Reconstruction*,<sup>5</sup> *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*,<sup>6</sup> *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge*,<sup>7</sup> *Reality and Scientific Theology*,<sup>8</sup> "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition,"<sup>9</sup> *The Christian Frame of Mind*,<sup>10</sup> "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective,"<sup>11</sup> *The Christian Doctrine of Marriage*,<sup>12</sup> *The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child*,<sup>13</sup> and *Divine Interpretation*.<sup>14</sup> Although Torrance, unlike Barth, does not systematize his anthropology in a series of books, his consistent engagement with anthropology reveals its significance.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology: Consonance between Theology and Science* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelations of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," *Modern Theology* 4 (1988), 309–322.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order, and Openness in Theology and Natural Science* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective," in *Religion, Reason and the Self: Essays in Honour of Hywel D. Lewis*, ed. Stewart R. Sutherland and T. A. Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989), 103–108.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of Marriage* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Interpretation*, ed. Adam Nigh and Todd Speidell (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2017).

Recent studies, such as “Theological Anthropology of Thomas F. Torrance,”<sup>15</sup> *Fully Human in Christ*,<sup>16</sup> *Trinitarian Grace and Participation*,<sup>17</sup> and *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ*,<sup>18</sup> shed important light on Torrance’s anthropology and ethics, thereby revealing horizontal and practical elements of his theology. With the help of such secondary literature, we can now see that the scope, content, and direction of Torrance’s theology involve both vertical/doxological and horizontal/practical implications.

The current essay aims to explore and reveal the theological anthropology that is of significance in Torrance’s theology and its key characteristics. Torrance’s anthropology has two main characteristics. First, Torrance uses various epistemologies in constructing and developing his anthropology. In the utilization of theological, philosophical, and scientific epistemologies, he elucidates and argues for two key anthropological concepts: the onto-relational concept of the person and the relational *imago Dei*. Hence, in order to properly understand what Torrance conveys in his anthropology, it is essential to have an integrated understanding of the epistemologies he utilized. Second, Torrance’s anthropology is grounded in and held together by his doctrine of the Trinity and Christology. For Torrance, the triune God underlies the definition of human beings, the restoration of personhood, and the ontological possibility of moral life and practice. Thus, in Torrance’s anthropology, the understanding of human beings is fundamentally rooted in God. Since Christ is regarded as the linchpin of personalization or humanization, for Torrance it is Christ who plays an ontological role in human restoration and transformation.

Based on the above understanding, I will first deal with Torrance’s historical understanding of humanness in the Greek, Roman, and Hebrew views of humanity,

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<sup>15</sup> Wei Jing, “The Theological Anthropology of Thomas F. Torrance: A Critical and Comparative Exploration” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Todd Speidell, *Fully Human in Christ: The Incarnation as the End of Christian Ethics* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Geordie W. Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace and Participation: An Entry into the Theology of T. F. Torrance* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ*.

considering his critique of Boethius' concept of the human person as an individual substance of rational nature. I will then explore Torrance's theological understanding of humanity as "the relational *imago Dei*" and address "the concept of the personalising person of Christ." Finally, I will consider Torrance's onto-relational interpretation of humanity in his scientific and philosophical epistemologies, that is, the concepts of the "personal agent" and the "person in relation." Through this investigation, the essay will reveal and argue that Torrance's anthropology is a theological anthropology with relation-centered, christocentric, and trinitarian content and direction.

## **Torrance's Historical Interpretation of Humanness**

### **The Greek, Roman, and Hebrew Views of Humanity**

According to Torrance, there are three great traditions pervading western thought in the understanding of humanity: Greek, Roman, and Hebrew.<sup>19</sup> The Greek and Roman views of humanity, albeit somewhat different, were underpinned by a dualism of body and soul, while the Hebraic view of humanity was an integrated understanding of body and soul. Torrance understands that it is the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle that underlie the impersonal and non-relational ways of thinking about humanity in the Greek and Roman traditions.

As Torrance expounds, Plato's philosophical interest lies in seeking certainty of the truth. For Plato, certainty of the truth belongs to what is eternal, unchangeable, and intelligible, which is called "forms" or "ideas," while the sense-experience of temporal and changeable objects, that is, natural events or actual situations, is not fully real, but, as it were, only "images" or "copies" of forms. In this sense, the world is divided into two realms: the visible and mutable world we live and experience, i.e., the world of copies and shadows, and the noetic and eternal world, i.e., the ideal world of forms. In differentiating the two, Plato posits a divine craftsman, Demiurge, and understands that all living beings in this visible world are given mind (*nous*) and soul (*psyche*) by the craftsman.<sup>20</sup> Although it is

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<sup>19</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Torrance, *Divine Interpretation*, 22–23.

the soul with eternity and rationality that is imprisoned in the body with temporality and change (the body-soul dualism), a living being with a soul given by the divine being contemplates “the eternal ideas or divine forms of truth.”<sup>21</sup>

Torrance points out that Plato’s dualist view creates distorted understandings of the world and humanity. As already seen, for Plato, the sense-experience of objects in the visible world is not considered to be real. In this understanding, as Torrance argues, the world or universe is not from the realm of scientific knowledge, as the world we live in and experience together is not fully real and thus empirical knowledge of the reality of this world is impossible.<sup>22</sup> In addition, in the visible world, real experience and knowledge of the living God and fellow human beings are also regarded as impossible, thereby resulting in a separation of the God-world-ourselves relation.<sup>23</sup> Torrance understands that Plato’s dualism alienates human beings from all other objective realities of the world of time and space.

Aristotle rejected the theory of transcendent ideas or forms in Plato’s philosophy. In Aristotle’s thought, as Torrance explains, the real forms are not separated from the individual objects of the sensible world, i.e., “matter,” but instead connected to them.<sup>24</sup> Hence, for Aristotle, “what is real” is not separated from or transcendent over an individual thing, but rather inherent to it (substance as it were). Therefore, it is substance that is a whole individual entity or a composite of form and matter.

Aristotle’s exposition of substance, that is, his ontology, is related to his teleology. Aristotle’s teleology is an account of something as a function of its end or purpose. For instance, in the process of an acorn becoming an oak, the acorn is matter with the purpose of becoming a tree. The matter (acorn) is material that realizes the form (oak), and the acorn grows according to the purpose of becoming an oak tree. At this point, Aristotle posits the “Unmoved Mover” as the cause that

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<sup>21</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 35-36.

<sup>22</sup> Torrance, *Divine Interpretation*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 47-49.

<sup>24</sup> Torrance, *Divine Interpretation*, 98.



makes teleological change and movement possible. The change and movement of all beings in the world is made possible by the divine existence operating in an indirect and latent manner.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike Plato, Aristotle understood that the human soul and body are interconnected. Yet, as Torrance expounds, when he considers the soul as the cause (form) of the body and the body as material (matter) expressing the soul, the soul has an existential superiority over the body and thus Aristotle shows a dualist tendency in separating the body and soul in an ontological way.<sup>26</sup>

Torrance points out the anthropological problems with Aristotle's philosophy as follows. First, in Aristotle's teleological worldview, human beings are not understood as personal beings because this does not account for the individual or personal intentions and actions of an individual.<sup>27</sup> Second, in Aristotle's ontology, which defines and explains substance as matter and form, "relationship" cannot be an important element in constituting beings and thus personal relationships are not considered as essential elements constituting human beings.<sup>28</sup> Third, when God is defined as the "Unmoved Mover," humans are not regarded as beings capable of personal communication and interaction with God, as the "Unmoved Mover" does not act in the world in a direct and personal way, but only in an indirect and potential way.<sup>29</sup>

Torrance states that the Hebrew view of humanity, unlike the Greek and Roman traditions, sees humans as holistic and united beings and understands them as personal and relational. In the Hebrew tradition, humans are beings with the body of their soul and the soul of their body, and they are in personal and relational intimacy with God and fellow humans.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Torrance, *Divine Interpretation*, 47-49.

<sup>27</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 63.

<sup>30</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 35.

Importantly, Torrance argues that it is the Hebrew view of humanity that is holistic, personal, and relational, and it came from the Israelites' unique understanding of God. As Torrance elucidates, in the Old Testament, God created humans as beings with a body and soul and in a personal relationship with God. God created Adam and Eve and established a personal relationship with them, not in the eternal divine realm, but in the created world of space and time. As such, the holistic, personal, and relational characteristics of human beings are fundamentally understood through their relationship with God, which is the human identity described in the Bible. For Torrance, the Hebrew view shows that human beings are intrinsically personal and relational and that human beings do not have to escape the earthly realm and enter the infinite divine world to encounter God, thereby rejecting the dualistic, impersonal, and non-relational understanding of the Greek and Roman traditions. In this way, Torrance accepts the personal and relational understanding of humanity from the Hebrew tradition as the basis for his anthropology.

### **Persons in Relation**

As Torrance elucidates, although we cannot find the specific concept of "person" in pre-Christian Jewish tradition, the Hebrew view of humanity offers a theological foundation for the concept of the human being as personal and relational. Further, the Hebrew view of humanity was extended when we entered the Christian era, and here the person of Christ and the onto-relational characteristics of the persons of the Trinity have had a decisive impact on the understanding of the human being as a person in relation.

Torrance argues that the concept of person was coined by the early church. It was through the concept of person that the church dealt with the union of Christ's divinity and humanity and "what he had revealed of the triune nature of God."<sup>31</sup> Yet, the concept of person was also applied to human beings who are personal "in virtue of their relation to God and to one another within the interpersonal structure of humanity," and thus human beings were considered as persons in relation.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

So, how does Torrance understand and define "person?" As Torrance elucidates, the term "person" was adopted and used by Greek theologians as the term "*hypostasis*," referring to a "self-subsistent being in its external objective relations in distinction to *ousia* which was used to refer to being in its interior relations."<sup>33</sup> Although the terms conceptually involved impersonal content and meaning, *ousia* and *hypostasis* were given "an intensely dynamic and personal significance" when reflected by the theological elucidation of the triune nature of God, that is, the inter-personal and relational objective relationships.<sup>34</sup> As Torrance puts it:

Thus used in the doctrine of the Trinity *ousia* denotes being in its internal relations, while *hypostasis* denotes being in its inter-personal objective relations, for in himself God is One Being, Three Persons. In their Christian use *ousia* and *hypostasis* were now given a concrete dynamic and intensely personal sense governed by the Nature of the One living God revealed in his saving presence and activity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

Given that the nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as persons is predicated on their personal relations, Torrance understands the concept of person in God as "an onto-relational concept."<sup>36</sup> As Torrance expounds, as the Father *is* Father in his indivisible ontic relation to the Son and the Spirit and *vice versa*, we have to precisely understand that the personal relations between the divine persons are

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<sup>33</sup> Torrance, "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective," 114. To better understand the etymological development of the term "person" in history, see Helen H. Perlman, *Persona: Social Role and Personality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 4–5; Stanley Rudman, *Concepts of Person and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 125–126; and Udo Thiel, "Personal identity," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 869.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 130.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 157.

essential to who they are as persons.<sup>37</sup> Hence, for Torrance, the divine persons are regarded as onto-relational, which is equally applied to our understanding of human beings as persons.

In this light, Torrance rejects Boethius' concept of person: "person is the individual substance of rational nature." Torrance points out that as Boethius' concept emphasizing individuality and rational substance logically derives from Aristotelian ontology, in Boethius' thought it is natural that the characteristics of human beings as persons are grounded on individuality and rationality.<sup>38</sup> In this understanding, we can therefore anticipate that the interpersonal relations with other personal beings have nothing to do with becoming a person and defining "person."

Torrance suggests that Boethius' non-relational and impersonal concept of person has had a damaging impact on the entire history of western anthropological thought. Boethius' concept of person was adopted by Thomas Aquinas and then inherited in René Descartes' notion of the epistemological subject, that is, *cogito, ergo sum* (self-certainty from self-consciousness).<sup>39</sup> In Boethius' concept of person, the individual is confined within himself, so that "his natural movement is one of self-determination over against other isolated individual subject-beings."<sup>40</sup> Hence, for Torrance, it is Boethius' concept of person that cannot be applicable, not only to the divine persons who are subsistent in and through their perichoretic relations, but also to the human persons who are constituted by the personal relations with God and fellow humans.

In this respect, Torrance regards Richard of St. Victor's understanding that a "person is the incommunicable existence of intellectual nature" as the proper concept of person. Here the expression of "the incommunicable existence" does not refer to a person's existence as an isolated individual cut off from the outside.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 43; *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 174-76.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 123.

<sup>40</sup> Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 175.

Instead, it refers to a person's objective and unshared existence in the pursuit of relationships with others. Although a person is distinct from the subject-being of the other, it is conditioned or constituted by personal relations with others, and thus, for Richard, relation becomes a constitutive element of a person.<sup>41</sup>

Importantly, Torrance states that Richard's concept of person is ontologically derived from the Trinity, in which the divine persons are not understood according to their "own independence as self-subsistence," but instead based on their "ontic relations to other persons."<sup>42</sup>

Torrance accounts for the theological and anthropological implications of the onto-relational concept of person: (1) since the triune God is "the creative, archetypal Source of all other personal beings and their interpersonal relations of love," all other created personal beings must be understood by "its source and its end, that is, by reference to the fullness of Love and personal Being in the Trinity"<sup>43</sup>; and (2) the human being is fundamentally open to others and an essentially personal being, not in its individuality or self-subsistence, but in its personal relations with other beings.<sup>44</sup> In this way, the onto-relational concept of person reveals the intrinsic inseparability between the individual and their personal relations.

### **Torrance's Theological Understanding of Human Beings: The Relational *imago Dei***

According to Torrance, in the Old Testament, the creation of humanity as unitary beings with body and soul originated *ex nihilo*. The Old Testament creation account shows that God is the source of human existence, and thus, as created beings, humanity is contingent on God. Although all created beings are contingent on God, human beings have a distinctively contingent nature by virtue of the fact that God directly addresses humanity, resulting in their personal communion with God.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 176–177.

<sup>44</sup> Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man," 310–312.

For Torrance, the distinct contingency of human being that is grounded in communion with God is now related to human identity as *imago Dei*. Rejecting the Platonic notion of any pre-existing soul and the Aristotelian static relationship between God in his deity and humanity, Torrance understands that in vertical contingency on God and personal interaction with him, the human being exists in the image of God. Therefore, for Torrance, human beings are regarded as the image of God "not in virtue of our rational nature or of anything we are inherently in our own beings, but solely through a relation to God in grace into which he has brought us in the wholeness and integrity of our human being."<sup>45</sup>

Torrance finds this relational *imago Dei* in the "spirit-Spirit relation" and the "male-female relation" in the creation of human beings. As Torrance notes, in creation the human spirit was given its existence in the personal relationship with God's Creator Spirit, who upholds and sustains human existence in his/her contingent openness and relation to God.<sup>46</sup> Through the power and presence of the Spirit, the human spirit is related to the triune God and given "the capacity to think and act in accordance with the nature (*kata physin*) of what is other than himself," that is, human rationality.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the human spirit is thought of only as subsistent in the personal and dynamic relationship with the Spirit.

In this respect, for Torrance, the human spirit is not something human beings have, nor the spark of the divine that Plato states, but instead a "transcendental determination" of their existence or "the ontological qualification of his/her soul," which is given and sustained by the Spirit.<sup>48</sup> In light of this, the human creature is an essentially relational being constituted only by "the being-constituting relation of the Creator."<sup>49</sup>

The relational *imago Dei* is also found in the male-female relation. Torrance notes that in the biblical creation narrative, the human creature is created not as a

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>47</sup> Torrance, "The Soul and Person," 110.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man," 311.

solitary individual, but as a man and a woman in love and marriage to become “one flesh.” When human beings begin their life in this loving union, it means that the basic unit of humanity is relation, not individual, and thus the essential fabric of human being is “co-humanity.” Therefore, for Torrance, human beings are understood as relational beings whose existence and life are constituted in their vertical relation with God and their horizontal relation with others.<sup>50</sup>

Torrance argues that the Old Testament understanding of humanity as the relational *imago Dei* is deepened and strengthened through “the acute personalization of human relations with God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>51</sup> For Torrance, Jesus Christ is decisive and central to the Christian understanding of humanity as the image of God: Christ (1) is the true image and reality of God and humanity; (2) fully restored and embodied the relational *imago Dei* in and through the union of divinity and humanity in his one person; and (3) now, through the Holy Spirit, Christ unites us with him and draws us into communion with the triune God who constitutes our being and life.<sup>52</sup>

For Torrance, union with Christ through the Holy Spirit is the point of ontological transformation. Through Christ, we are drawn into communion with God where human distortion, malice, and corruption are healed and resolved, and we are thereby transformed into “the human beings we ought to be,” that is, human beings in truly personal relations with God.<sup>53</sup> The ontological restoration brought about by the vertical relationship with God through Christ also impacts human behavior and lifestyles, and so personal relations with neighbors are gradually restored. As a result, we become onto-relational persons who exist and live in personal relations with God and our neighbors. Hence, for Torrance, human ontological restoration through union with Christ is the creative source for personal and ethical lives in human communities.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 39.

<sup>52</sup> Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ*, 24–25.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 70; “The Goodness and Dignity of Man,” 315.

Thus, for Torrance, Christ is a “personalising person,” while human beings are “personalised persons” who receive “the true substance of our personal being both in relation to God and in relation to one another.”<sup>54</sup> The sinful humanity that was alienated from God experienced atonement, sanctification, righteousness, and reconciliation through union with the divinity of Christ in his incarnation. The Holy Spirit unites us with Christ, so that “personalisation,” already accomplished *objectively* or ontologically in and through the vicarious humanity of Christ, i.e., the full restoration of the relational *imago Dei*, is now realized *subjectively*.<sup>55</sup> In union with Christ, we not only participate in the human nature that is already fully personalized through Christ, but also in the fellowship of the triune God, a participation that gives rise to a personal transformation in our being, life, and relations.

To sum up, in Torrance’s theological understanding, the human being is the relational *imago Dei* or onto-relational person whose existence and life are constituted by personal relations with God and others. Through union with Christ, the personalizing person, the human being is personalized and drawn into fellowship with the triune God who is the creative source of our ontological and relational change. In this respect, Torrance’s anthropology can be understood as a theological anthropology with a relation-centered, christocentric, and trinitarian content and direction.

## **Torrance’s Scientific and Philosophical Understanding of the Human Being: The Personal Agent and Person in Relation**

Torrance’s relation-centered anthropology is further supported and developed through scientific and philosophical epistemologies. This is evident in the concepts of Michael Polanyi’s “personal knowledge” and John Macmurray’s “person in relation” that Torrance accepted and utilized.

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<sup>54</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 39.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “Introduction,” *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church*, ed. and trans. Thomas F. Torrance (London: James Clarke and Co., 1959), cvi–cxviii.



## Personal Knowledge

Polanyi, a Hungarian chemist and philosopher, is one of the most influential scholars in the philosophy of science. Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* (1958) is considered to be his most important book; in this he emphasizes the personal aspect of human knowledge. In opposition to Newton's mechanistic worldview, in which belief is treated as mere opinion or unfounded conviction lacking any element of scientific knowledge, Polanyi argues that belief facilitates "an intuitive grasp of a reality" and thus is an essential component of knowledge.<sup>56</sup>

For Polanyi, scientific knowledge is not a logical process derived from inquiry through deductive reasoning. Rather, knowledge arises from a direct and intuitive encounter with an objective reality that takes place within the mind of the human knower. Of course, the intelligibility of objective reality is inherent in its nature: it is invisible and must be thought of as independent of us, but through belief or intuitive understanding, the mind of the intellectual can grasp the perceptible characteristics of objective reality.<sup>57</sup> In this case, knowledge is a personal element and it is only possible within a person's engagement with an objective reality. Hence, for Polanyi, knowledge is personal knowledge obtained in a human knower's personal relation with the objective reality through personal participation and responsible commitment.<sup>58</sup>

Following Polanyi, Torrance argues that in scientific knowledge the human agent must be regarded as a person in relation to objective reality through a fiduciary framework, that is, belief or faith. Interestingly, Torrance understands that the personal nature in scientific knowledge is also found in theological knowledge. As Torrance elucidates, both science and theology, despite being different in scope and content, derive their beliefs from the intelligibility inherent in the object of belief. In theological knowledge, human convictions and beliefs about God arise

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998), 114.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Belief in Science and in Christian Life: The Relevance of Michael Polanyi's Thought for Christian Faith and Life* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1980), 9.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 66, 160–170, 299–316

within us “as basic acts of assent and acknowledgement on the part of our minds to divine Reality which we cannot know except on grounds of service and obedient listening or submission.”<sup>59</sup> In this way, scientific and theological activities share the fiduciary component of knowledge. In science and theology, the objective reality, that is, the world or God, and its perceptible nature and characteristics are not identified and revealed through antecedent concepts or the process of impersonal and abstract inquiry, but instead through the personal and heuristic process of knowing.<sup>60</sup>

For Torrance, Polanyi’s concept of personal knowledge has the following anthropological significance. First, in the concept of personal knowledge, human beings are in personal relations with objective reality and they are portrayed as beings who can grasp the nature of objective reality. Thus, in scientific knowledge humanity is a personal and rational agent in a personal relationship with realities. Also, when understanding human beings as personal agents, objectivism, which separates personal convictions or actions from the objective reality in order to secure pure knowledge, is excluded, and thus human beings are understood as persons who obtain scientific and theological knowledge in their personal interrelations with God and the world.<sup>61</sup>

### **Persons in Relation**

Torrance explains and develops his onto-relational concept of person not only through Polanyi’s philosophy of science, but also through the personalist philosophy of Macmurray, a Scottish philosopher. Accepting Macmurray’s understanding of the personal relationship between reason and reality and his concept of human beings as not isolated individuals, but persons in relation, Torrance rejects the impersonal and non-relational understanding of human beings.

Torrance critiques Descartes’ approach to knowledge, which begins with “doubt” as a form of self-assurance. Human beings are the thinking self and acquire

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<sup>59</sup> Torrance, *Belief in Science and in Christian Life*, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 67–68.

<sup>61</sup> Torrance, *Belief in Science and in Christian Life*, 12.

knowledge of the objective reality through the process of doubting or observing phenomena. Torrance elucidates that, in this process, knowledge of reality becomes nothing more than an intellectual description that arises within self-consciousness or thought. Put another way, objective realities, such as the world, God, and other humans, are recognized in self-consciousness, not in personal communication and interrelation. In this way, it is not relationality but self-consciousness that is an important factor in obtaining knowledge about realities, resulting in an impersonal and non-relational conception of God-world-ourselves.<sup>62</sup>

Based on Macmurray's understanding that "reason is our capacity to behave consciously in terms of the nature of what is not ourselves," Torrance also considers "reason" as the ability to act.<sup>63</sup> Thus, for Torrance, like Macmurray, it is reason that makes knowledge of reality possible by grasping the nature of the reality revealed to us, a process that is not confined to intellectual ways of thinking, but occurs in all aspects of human life and behavior in relation to objective reality.

In this respect, Torrance understands that knowledge is *a posteriori* and heuristic. For Torrance, the heuristic understanding of knowledge becomes a proper approach to our scientific, anthropological, and theological knowledge. When we understand knowledge as *a posteriori* knowledge that is only possible through a personal relationship with the objective reality, human beings are understood as persons in relation. In this light, the distorted understanding of human beings, that is human beings as isolated individuals or observers separated from personal relations with realities, is rejected. Thus, for Torrance, relationships with objective realities occurring in the realm of human life are essential to understanding the personal and relational characteristics of human beings, an understanding that is in line with Macmurray's understanding that "personal existence is constituted by the relation of persons."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 57.

<sup>63</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 122.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 232; John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 12.

## Conclusion

Through the above exploration, we have seen key features of Torrance's anthropology. In summary, in the wide-ranging utilization of theological, scientific, and philosophical epistemologies, Torrance reveals that human beings must be considered onto-relational persons created in *imago Dei*, thereby rejecting impersonal and non-relational understandings of human beings based on rationality and individuality. His exposition of the onto-relational characteristics of humanity presented in various epistemologies can be considered an advantage of Torrance's anthropology. Moreover, Torrance's anthropology clearly reveals why Christian anthropology must be understood in christocentric and trinitarian ways of thinking. Jesus Christ is the perfect image and reality of God and humanity, and through the Holy Spirit we can now have union with Christ who draws us into the trinitarian fellowship and communion, i.e., the creative source of human ontological transformation.

It is important to note that when Torrance understands human beings as onto-relational persons constituted by interpersonal relations with God and others, this understanding is not merely a dogmatic exposition, but also extends to practical implications. Inasmuch as the understanding of the dynamic, personal, and mutually indwelling fellowship and relationship of the triune God offers an intellectual foundation for the interpersonal structure and content of human society – *what human beings and life ought to be* – a theological anthropology, which sheds important light on and reveals the personality and rationality of the triune God, can be essential to overcoming individualism and fostering communion. Through an understanding of human beings as persons in relation created in *imago Dei*, we can also move towards a more egalitarian and inclusive society with mutual communication. In this respect, Colin Gunton asserts that a Christian anthropology based on the mutual personal relations of the triune God are necessary in contemporary culture and society.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Colin Gunton, "Being and Person: T. F. Torrance's Doctrine of God," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 131.

Given the social impact of a relational-centered anthropology, Torrance's anthropology can function as an epistemological tool that supports interpersonal and intercommunicative human relationships and societies. Torrance's emphasis on the significance of union with Christ as the personalizing person also clearly reveals where Christian anthropology derives its main force. In union with Christ through the Spirit, we are truly personalized or humanized so that our being, life, and relationship encounter personal and relational restoration and transformation.

Importantly, based on his onto-relational understanding of humanity, Torrance dealt with some ethical and social issues, such as gender equality in the family and society, the role of women in ministry, and abortion, thereby revealing the practicality of his anthropology.<sup>66</sup> In this way, his anthropology has positive impacts on numerous areas of human society, including the home, church, school, and the workplace, where more equal and interpersonal relationships are required. Therefore, we can evaluate Torrance's anthropology as a theological and practical anthropology with personal and relational implications that are necessary and essential for social ethics.

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<sup>66</sup> For more on ethical issues in the theology of Torrance, see Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ*, 123–139.



## **INCARNATION AND RECREATION:**

### **The Fallen Nature of Christ and the Re-creation of Humanity**

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**Abstract:** *This paper seeks to examine the way in which T. F. Torrance argues for Jesus' assumption of a fallen human nature in the Incarnation as essential to the recreation and personalization of our humanity. In the fall, our human nature was corrupted in such a way that we are alienated and estranged from God and are subject in every way to the effects of this fallen life. However, in the Incarnation Jesus assumed not just some abstract form of a human nature but rather the very human nature that needed healing, that is, a fallen human nature. In the act of joining this fallen nature to himself and carrying that with him throughout his entire incarnate life, Jesus heals that fallen nature and offers us a new way to be human. Thus, the assumption of the fallen nature is essential for its healing and for creating this new way to be human.*

In the 1800s, Scottish theologian Edward Irving was declared a heretic by the Church of Scotland for teaching that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the incarnation. Irving's insistence that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the Incarnation did not end because of this declaration; but rather, according to some

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scholars like Donald Macleod, this Irvingite way of viewing Jesus' human nature has been passed down to theologians that have come after him such as H. R. Mackintosh, Karl Barth, Thomas F. Torrance, and James B. Torrance.<sup>1</sup> I have argued elsewhere for the validity of this viewpoint and it is outside of the purview of this article to make this argument yet again.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between T. F. Torrance's theology of the Incarnation and his anthropology. More specifically, in this paper *I will argue that Jesus' assumption of a fallen human nature is essential to the recreation and personalization of our humanity in Torrance's thought.* As Torrance argues, "That which really makes man man is the bond between man and God."<sup>3</sup> Thus, to help clarify our understanding about what it means to truly be human is to understand the relationship between God and humankind which was restored through the Incarnation and atonement of Jesus as he assumes our fallen nature to himself in order to redeem it and restore it into fellowship with God. To accomplish the stated thesis this paper will take the following format. First, the effect of sin on our humanity will be explained in order to understand what it is that needs to be restored. Second, it will be crucial to define terms and give a clear explanation of Torrance's view of Jesus' fallen nature to lay the theological groundwork. Third, and finally, the relationship between the Incarnation and atonement will be examined to make the case that Jesus' assumption of a fallen human nature is essential to the recreation of our humanity through the atonement.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Macleod. "The Doctrine of the Incarnation in Scottish Theology: Edward Irving," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 9, no. 1 (1991): 40–50.

<sup>2</sup> See Daniel J. Cameron, *Flesh and Blood: A Dogmatic Sketch Concerning the Fallen Nature View of Christ's Human Nature* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), and Daniel J. Cameron, "The Fallen Humanity of Christ and the Work of the Spirit in the Thought of Edward Irving," in *The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened: An Abridgment with Introduction and Response* ed. Alex Irving (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 205–220. See also Daniel J. Cameron "What It Means That Jesus Was Without Sin," *Christianity Today* (8 September 2021): <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/november-web-only/what-it-means-that-jesus-was-without-sin.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 39.



## The Fallen Human Nature

The place that we must begin, in attempting to understand the connection between the fallen nature that Christ assumed in the Incarnation and his recreation of our humanity, is with establishing an understanding of the problem of sin. That is, we must begin by establishing a clear understanding of our fallen nature. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve rebel against God and plunge the entirety of humanity into a state of sinfulness. This idea of sinfulness in modern language has been described as simply disobedience, or “missing the mark,” that is breaking the law. This external way of thinking about sin suffers from what Torrance calls the “Latin heresy.” This Latin heresy is a way of thinking in terms of “external relations” which has infected Western theology. It is known as the Latin heresy “for in theology at any rate its roots go back to a form of linguistic and conceptual dualism that prevailed in Patristic and Mediaeval Latin theology.”<sup>4</sup> It developed through a Western way of thinking in terms of “formal relations” which was accentuated through a Cartesian way of thinking in terms of “external relations,” as in a system of laws, which grew out of a Kantian understanding that things could not be known in terms of their “internal relations,” as in dynamic interpersonal relations.<sup>5</sup> He traces this back to Arius at the council of Nicea in which he was “operating with the axiomatic assumption of an epistemological and cosmological dualism which shut God out of any direct interaction with the world.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, Jesus could not be God and was therefore simply a created human. The teaching of the New Testament in which Jesus is *homoousios* with the Father was in direct contradiction to the teaching of Arius and conversely, indicated that there was an unbreakable internal relation between the Father and the Son in which both are fully God.

This way of thinking in external relations snuck into Western theology in a way in which all Christian theology was affected. Torrance is concerned to recover the thinking of Karl Barth and Athanasius such that their teaching gave space to “internal relations in the coherent structure of Christian theology, and of the way in

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas F. Torrance “Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986): 463.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

which he exposed and rejected the habit of thinking in terms of external relations which had come to characterise so much of Western theology.”<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, Torrance utilizes this phraseology in order to identify the way in which Western theology thinks only in terms of these external relations.<sup>8</sup> This has affected the way in which we understand the way Jesus’ Incarnation and atonement affect who we are as sinners. We must avoid “understanding Christ’s saving work in a way which detached that work from his person as the Incarnate Word.”<sup>9</sup>

To understand what it means to say that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the incarnation, it is important that we first understand how the problem of sin affects us. If we are to move away from this external way of thinking in which sin is simply the missing of the mark or simply our disobedience to God, we have to define this problem of sin. In scripture sin is described in its three senses: a state of being (corruption of nature), the path we walk (life of estrangement and rebellion), and our guilty standing before God (morally subjugated to the wrath of God). If we were to put scriptures’ way of describing sin into a pie chart, the second two aspects — the path we walk and our guilty standing — would take up the majority of the pie chart while the first aspect of our state of being would take up a sliver of the pie. However, this is backward thinking. Our sinful actions, the path we walk, and our guilty standing before God are ultimately the symptoms of our corrupt state of being. Sin at its essence must be understood as a corruption of our human nature which therefore corrupts our human relations. The prophet Jeremiah cries out for a “Balm in Gilead.” This metaphor would have been very familiar with the people who were listening to Jeremiah. Gilead was a region just east of the Jordan River and north of Moab which was “was famous for its healing ointment made from the resin of a tree whose identity is uncertain.”<sup>10</sup> But the prophet goes on to ask why there is no healing then for his people. This word here for healing is literally

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>8</sup> C.f. E. Jerome van Kuiken, *Christ’s Humanity In Current And Ancient Controversy: Fallen Or Not?* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 43.

<sup>9</sup> Paul D. Molnar “Thomas F. Torrance and the Problem of Universalism,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 68 (2015): 184.

<sup>10</sup> F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 16, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 117.

“new flesh.”<sup>11</sup> The prophet is crying out for healing for a sickness that is infecting the people. This sickness is sin. This is echoed and expanded in Paul’s writing in Ephesians 2 when he declares that we are “dead in our transgressions and sins.”<sup>12</sup> The remedy of this sickness is what is promised in the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36:25-27 which says,

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.<sup>13</sup>

What God promises is a new nature in which we will walk the right path and stand innocent before God. But, for the totality of sin to be dealt with, we need more than simply the forgiveness of our wrongdoings or a good moral example. We need a gut rehab, that is, a heart that has been completely made new by the Spirit and the love of God. in which the entirety of what it means to be a postlapsarian human is gutted and remade from the inside out.

In the Old Testament, atonement was made through participation in the sacrificial system in which a lamb was sacrificed providing temporary propitiation and right standing before God. However, a lamb could never recreate human nature and was thus only a temporary solution to the problem of sin. The Old Testament sacrificial system pointed forward to the day in which God would remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh, as the prophet Ezekiel prophesied. In Galatians 4:4-5, Paul argues that “when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.”<sup>14</sup> While the temporary solution to sin began in the OT sacrificial system at the Tabernacle and the Temple, the ultimate solution to

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 2:1 (NIV).

<sup>13</sup> Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NIV).

<sup>14</sup> Galatians 4:4-5 (NIV).

sin begins to take place when Jesus “tabernacled” among us.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the solution to sin is tied directly to the Incarnation of Jesus.

## The Fallen Human Nature and Jesus

As we begin to examine the Incarnation and the reality that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the incarnation, it is important to note that the Incarnation is not simply a “prelude” or the “necessary means for atonement,” as if Jesus became human so that he could die or to make him mortal.<sup>16</sup> The person and action of God cannot be abstracted from one another. Key to understanding this is the idea carried about by the word *homoousion*. This word was used at the Council of Nicaea to describe the relationship of the Father and the Son confirming that they are of the same nature. This word is of “staggering significance” because it is the “heart and substance of our Christian faith.”<sup>17</sup> At its very core, this word is describing the ontological reality that God and Jesus are one in nature. Therefore, what God is in his very nature he is in action towards us in Jesus Christ. For “what kind of God would we have, then, if Jesus Christ were not the self-revelation or self-communication of God, if God were not inherently and eternal in his own being what the Gospel tells us he is in Jesus Christ.”<sup>18</sup> This is crucial, for if Jesus is not God then we are not saved, “for it is in virtue of his Deity that his saving work as man has its validity.”<sup>19</sup> Elmer Colyer describes the importance of this doctrine well in his book *How To Read T. F. Torrance* saying,

The *homousion* is vital, for if the homoousial bond between Jesus Christ and God is cut, the bottom falls out of the gospel, because only God can atone for sin and save. Yet it is also critical that Jesus Christ is of one and the same being and nature with humanity, for if the

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<sup>15</sup> See John 1:14.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 263.

<sup>17</sup> Torrance, “The Evangelical Significance,” 165.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 134.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas F. Torrance *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard Publishers, 1992), 54–55.

incarnate Son is not fully human, the gospel is also emptied of soteriology significance.<sup>20</sup>

It is on these grounds that Paul can say in 1 Timothy 2:5 (NIV) that there is "one mediator between God and mankind, the man Jesus Christ." This, however, is not to be understood in such a way as Jesus is simply the means to an end. That is, Jesus is not simply the bridge that we walk over to get to God, no longer needing it once we are across. But rather, Jesus stepped into a situation of intense conflict between "the covenant faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of man and took the conflict into his own flesh as the incarnate Son and bore it to the very end."<sup>21</sup> This means that the act of atonement began to take place before the crucifixion of Jesus. It began in the incarnation.

The homoousion cannot be fully understood without also bringing into the conversation the hypostatic union. That is, the "internal relation of the atonement to the incarnate Person of Christ" because of the union of God and man within the one person of Jesus.<sup>22</sup> This way of thinking is what Torrance refers to as "onto-relations" or a doctrine of internal relations. It is in the person of Christ that God and man are united within the incarnate person of Jesus Christ. Jesus' person and work cannot be separated from each other for his "humanity is not just a means to an end."<sup>23</sup> Thus the Incarnation and atonement must be thought of not as two distinct and unconnected realities, one simply the means to the end, but rather they must be understood in terms of their "internal relations within the incarnate constitution of Christ."<sup>24</sup> In other words, "His person and work are one ... Jesus

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<sup>20</sup> Elmer Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), 81.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "Atonement and the Oneness of the Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 7 (1954): 251.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1980), 165.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 58.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Christ is redemption, he is righteousness, he is eternal life.”<sup>25</sup> Before we can begin to explain and give clear definition to what it means that Christ assumed a fallen human nature, it is important to explain the nature of the Virgin birth for it is from his mother that Jesus receives his humanity.

In Roman Catholic theology it is believed that Mary was immaculately conceived. Reynolds argues that “The Virgin Mary was preserved entirely free from original sin from the instant of her conception through a special prevenient grace, received in view of the merits of her Son in anticipation of the Redemption.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, Mary was considered to be free from original sin and, according to the Council of Trent, Mary was considered to be free from personal sin as well.<sup>27</sup> Protestants, however, rejected this teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>28</sup> While Protestants and Roman Catholics disagree on the immaculate conception of Mary, both are concerned with Jesus’ assumption of an unfallen nature. While Roman Catholic theology states that Mary was free from both original and personal sin in order to be a pure vessel from which the Savior was to come, Protestants get to the same place, that is, the purity of Jesus’ human nature, in how they discuss the doctrine of the virgin birth. Jesus assumed an unfallen and pure human nature in the Incarnation due to the virginity of Mary. This, however, takes a rather strong Augustinian interpretation of the transmission of sin in which “concupiscence constitutes the essence of original sin inasmuch as it dictates the process of reproduction, by which the corruption that took control of Adam’s body and its seminal capacity is passed down in an uninterrupted fashion through the chain of all human generations.”<sup>29</sup> This transmission does not take place in some external forensic or juridical sense but rather, “based on the specific relationship, affected by

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Brian K. Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven: Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods* (New York: New City Press, 2012), 330.

<sup>27</sup> See Robert Fastiggi, “Mariology in the Counter-Reformation,” in Chris Maunder, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> See Carol Engelhardt Herringer, “Mary as a Cultural Symbol in the Nineteenth Century,” in Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Pier Franco Beatrice and Adam Kamesar, “The Essence and Transmission of Original Sin,” in *The Transmission of Sin* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 68.

human semen, that connects children to their parents and allows the substance of which bodily flesh is composed to be transmitted from the latter to the former.”<sup>30</sup> This then means that it is in Adam that all humanity was contained in his loins and upon sinning all people are then corrupted with original sin. As Beatrice argues,

The consequence of this situation is that, if the reproductive processes are deeply corrupt, if the male seed is defective, and if sexual desire is the exclusive driving force of everyone’s physical birth, then all of human history turns into a painful scene of sin and corruption. And this sin is none other than original sin, a sin that multiplies uninterruptedly through the course of centuries by the inescapable laws of heredity, as long as flesh reproduces into flesh, continuously compelled to do so by the diabolical goad of concupiscence.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, since Jesus was not born of the seed of a man he is preserved from the stain of sin and lives in a perfect human nature. However, this does not seem to be what the doctrine of the virgin birth is really about. As Torrance argues, the purpose of the Virgin birth is to teach us three things. First, the virgin birth grounds the true humanity of Christ. That is, Jesus was “really born of Mary, born through all the embryonic processes of the womb as any other human being.”<sup>32</sup> There is a difference though in the birth of Jesus and any other real human birth and this leads to the second thing that the virgin birth teaches us about Jesus. Second, the virgin birth shows a fracture in the sinful autonomy of humanity. This means that Jesus was not born “as other men are of the will of the flesh.”<sup>33</sup> Jesus was born not of the will of man but of the will of God contra *adoptionism*. Third, the virgin birth reveals the divine origin of Christ. This has to do with the idea of *kenosis* in Philippians 2:7 in which Christ “emptied” himself. The word used here is the Greek word ἐκένωσεν which carries with it not the idea that Jesus lost anything in himself but rather that he “emptied himself out of heaven on to earth, out of eternity into

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>32</sup> Torrance, “The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth,” 18.

<sup>33</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 100.

time.”<sup>34</sup> Jesus did not then lose anything of what it means that he is God, but rather this should be thought of as a “veiling of his divine nature” which was to be unveiled at the resurrection.<sup>35</sup> Thus, while the virgin birth speaks to us regarding the humanity of Christ, it is not attempting to argue for the unfallen human nature of Christ but that the Incarnation is of the will of God and not of the will of man. As Edward Irving argued, Jesus “was of the seed of David; that He was the seed of Abraham, as well as the seed of the woman; yea, that He was the seed of the woman after she fell, and not before she fell.”<sup>36</sup>

What does it mean then to say that Jesus assumed a “fallen” human nature in the incarnation? The argument for Christ having a fallen human nature in the Incarnation is not for the purpose of arguing that Jesus was fully human for fallenness “is not an essential property of a particular human nature.”<sup>37</sup> Rather, it is argued that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the Incarnation for the purpose of atonement for it was fallen humans that need to be recreated and given a new way to be human. Clarity is essential in describing this fallen nature lest we end up with a Jesus who is a sinner in need of a savior himself.<sup>38</sup> So what does a “fallen” human nature entail?

A quick glance at the writings of T. F. Torrance can come across as inconsistent in that he appears to argue for a fallen nature that entails original sin and at the same time a fallen nature that does not entail original sin. However, Torrance is not being inconsistent; rather, what we are seeing is the maturing of his theology over time. His position that the fallen nature does not entail original sin is

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas F. Torrance. *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 118.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, vol 5 (London: Strahan Publishers, 1865), 5, 116.

<sup>37</sup> Crisp, “Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?,” 272.

<sup>38</sup> Whereas, in the past, Oliver Crisp has denied the fallen nature view as plausible and theologically defensible he has come to change his mind regarding the defensibility of this position due to conversations with theologian Michael Rea. He now defends the idea of Jesus’ assumption of a fallen human nature in the sense that he experienced the effects of the fall without himself assuming a nature tainted by sin. See Oliver D. Crisp “On the Vicarious Humanity of Christ,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21 (2019): 235–50.



in his earlier writings<sup>39</sup> while he holds to a position that does entail original sin in his later writings.<sup>40</sup> For the sake of space, this article will focus on a definition of fallen nature according to Torrance's more mature views.

To say that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature is to argue that in the Incarnation "Christ sinlessly and vicariously assumed, not only the physical consequences of sin ... but assumes our original sin and guilt and our twisted, distorted, bent mind contained in our actual human nature, and in assuming it right from the very beginning our Lord converted it, healed it, and sanctified it in himself."<sup>41</sup> This internal/ontological way of thinking about atonement is crucial for the very nature of sin is personal and ontological. Thus, since the problem of "sin is an act of man going down to the roots of human nature ... then it is in the inner depth of their personal being that humanity must be reconciled to God and we must be healed of our enmity and contradiction to God."<sup>42</sup> Thus, since the problem of sin is at the root of our very being, that is our ontology, atonement is not something that can be done *externally* to us and our humanity but rather

It must be worked through the heart and mind of men and women, until they are brought to acquiesce in the divine judgment on sin and are restored in heart and mind to communion with God. Reconciliation ... is not just the clearing up of a misunderstanding, but the eliminating

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<sup>39</sup> His early lectures at Auburn can be found here Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001). In these writings a weaker view of the fallen nature is argued. According to these writings the fallen nature can be understood in that "in the incarnation God comes near to sinful man, inasmuch as he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and in doing so he assumed the suffering of infirmity and temptation, the enmity of God against sin, and the enmity of Satan against sinners," Cameron, *Flesh and Blood*, 16.

<sup>40</sup> See Torrance, *Incarnation*. See also Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> Cameron, *Flesh and Blood*, 20. Torrance seems to be inconsistent, or at the very least unclear about when in fact the sanctification of this nature takes place, for he makes comments that the nature was sanctified upon assumption, and then his comments on Luke 2:52 and John 17:19 say that he sanctified it throughout his life. In conversations with other Torrance scholars, we were unable to come to a clear conclusion regarding Torrance's official stance.

<sup>42</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 159.

of a lie that has its roots in our natures as fallen and as perverted personal being. Hence the incarnation entailed a physical or ontological union, as well as a Logos-union with man (that is, a union with man in being as well as in word and mind) as the means of reconciliation to God.<sup>43</sup>

Atonement, thus, is something accomplished *from within* our fallen nature as Paul argues in Romans 8:3 "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh" (NRSV).

Jesus condemns sin in the flesh by taking our fallen nature upon himself. This is what 2 Corinthians 5:21 is arguing when it says "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (NRSV). When Paul says that he was made "to be sin" (ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν) some have interpreted this to mean that Christ was made a "sin offering."<sup>44</sup> While the word ἁμαρτίαν is used in the LXX for "sin offering" it is not used in the New Testament with this meaning.<sup>45</sup> Garland notes that there are problems with interpreting ἁμαρτίαν as "sin offering" in 2 Corinthians 5:21. He argues that, "The word *hamartia* does not have the meaning 'sin offering' elsewhere in the New Testament, and if Paul intends that meaning here, then he uses the word with two quite different meanings in the same sentence."<sup>46</sup> You see, Paul argues that Jesus "knew no sin" (μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν) and that Jesus was "made to be sin" (ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν). It does not make sense that Paul would be using the same word in the same sentence to mean different things. Garland argues that if Paul had intended to mean use ἁμαρτίαν in "sense of 'sin offering,' it would have been more fitting to use the verb 'presented' or 'offered' rather than 'made.'"<sup>47</sup> To interpret this phrase as

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 158, 161.

<sup>44</sup> See S. Lyonnet and L. Sabourin, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study*, AB 48 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1971) 185–296.

<sup>45</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 300.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

“sin offering” also does not take into account the parallelism in the passage between sin (ἁμαρτίαν) and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). Thus, it can be argued that Paul intended to communicate the reality that Jesus truly became sin though, and of extreme importance, he maintains the reality that Jesus “knew no sin.” Jesus, in assuming the fallen nature, remains personally sinless. In other words, “by saying it was ‘for us,’ he protects Christ’s sinlessness.”<sup>48</sup> In assuming this fallen nature and living out a life of perfect obedience, he sanctifies and heals our nature throughout the whole course of his life. Jesus then carries our distorted mind into his struggle on the cross and descends to the realm of the dead, thus bringing our fallen nature under the judgment of God, in order to get at the very root of sin and redeem us from it.<sup>49</sup> To further help our understanding of how this is possible, an explanation of the ideas of *an-hypostasia* and *en-hypostasia* is necessary.

*An-hypostasia* can be defined in the following way: “Christ’s human nature has its existence only in union with God, in God’s existence or personal mode of being (*hypostasis*). It does *not* possess it in and for itself — hence *an-hypostasis* (‘not person’, i.e. no separate person.”<sup>50</sup> *En-hypostasia* makes the claim that in the act of the Son assuming a human nature that human nature is given existence “in the existence of God, and co-exists in the divine existence or mode of being — hence *en-hypostasis* (‘person in,’ that is, real human person in the person of the Son).”<sup>51</sup> *An-hypostasis* argues that Jesus assumed a human nature that is in continuity with all other humans, that is, he assumes a general human nature which is then brought into the person of the Son (*en-hypostasis*) in which he has real individual personhood. In other words, the person of the Son personalizes the *an-hypostatic* human nature. What does this mean when it is said that he personalizes the *an-hypostatic* human nature? What this means is that Jesus assumes a human nature “void of a hypostasis of its own” which was brought into union with the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>49</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 440.

<sup>50</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 84. For an extended dialogue on these two terms see Robert Walker, “The Innovative Fruitfulness of An/En-Hypostasis in Thomas F. Torrance,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2020), 189–206.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

person of the Son in order that there might be “one and the same hypostasis of the Logos and of the human nature assumed, outside of which neither ever subsists, nor can subsist.”<sup>52</sup>

The doctrines of *an/en-hypostasia* are important for understanding how and why Jesus can maintain his sinlessness in the assumption of a fallen nature. *An-hypostasia* communicates to us the fact that, in the incarnation, Jesus did not assume an independently existing human person, but rather that the Son of God “took possession of human nature, [so] as to set aside that which divides us men from one another, our independent centers of personality, and to assume that which unites us with one another, the possession of the same or common human nature.”<sup>53</sup> That is, Jesus did not assume a fallen person in the Incarnation but only a fallen human nature and thus has ontological solidarity with us in our fallen natures. It is with his *en-hypostatic* assumption of this nature that Jesus finds “solidarity in terms of the interaction of persons within our human and social life, in personal relations of love, commitment, responsibility, decision, etc.”<sup>54</sup>

It is crucial to have both doctrines working with each other to gain a full understanding of the Incarnation and atonement. For, if Jesus had simply brought about atonement in his union with us there would be no need for the cross and the resurrection for his “atonement had already been accomplished fully and entirely in the birth of Jesus, in the bare assumption of our human nature into oneness with the Son of God.”<sup>55</sup> The Incarnation and the atonement are essentially tied together in his work to recreate our human nature. The teaching that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature in the Incarnation was never to argue that he was fully human, but rather that it was a necessary part of rooting out the corruption of sin from within our fallen natures. It was for the sake of atonement.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 228–229.

<sup>53</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 231.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>55</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 163.

## The Fallen Human Nature Recreated and Personalized

Jesus' *en-hypostatic* union with us is a personalizing union. This personalizing union results in the reality that "Jesus Christ is now the fount of all that is truly personal among us; we are not personal in virtue of some personal substance inherent in ourselves, but only through what we received from Jesus Christ ... to be personal, therefore is to be in Christ."<sup>56</sup> What this means is that when we share in Jesus' justification, sanctification, reconciliation, etc. we are "personalised or humanised as persons who are in true relations with God and other persons and we live out a new moral life and order before God and others."<sup>57</sup> For Torrance, this comes about through Christ's atoning reconciliation in which he exchanges our sin and corruption for his holiness and righteousness. Reconciliation is the "exchange affected by substitution or expiation, that is, atonement or reconciliation through atonement."<sup>58</sup> This reconciliation takes place within Jesus Christ in the hypostatic union of divinity and humanity and thus his humanity is essential for the recreation of our human nature.<sup>59</sup> This is all grounded in Torrance's understanding of the soteriological significance of the hypostatic union and the homoousion as previously discussed. Kim notes in agreement,

his humanity also underlies the onto-relational reconciliation between God and humanity which is evident in the two doctrines: of the homoousion and the hypostatic union. Torrance derives the soteriological significance of the humanity of Christ from the two doctrines, for the two together expound how Jesus Christ mediates reconciliation (or the actuality of atonement) not in an external but in an internal act, as it were, in our estranged and sinful humanity.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," *Modern Theology* 4 (1988): 318.

<sup>57</sup> Hakbong Kim, "Person, Personhood and the Humanity of Christ: Christocentric Anthropology and Ethics in Thomas F. Torrance" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh. June 29, 2020), 80.

<sup>58</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 138.

<sup>59</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 186.

<sup>60</sup> Kim, "Person, Personhood and the Humanity of Christ," 89.

The fallen nature of Christ is thus key in understanding the anthropology of Torrance in which the new humanity is discussed for it is only within the human nature of Christ that reconciliation and atonement are achieved. That is, reconciliation and atonement are achieved from *within* our fallen human nature not because it is what ensures his *full* humanity but because that fallen humanity is the humanity that needs to be healed. This, reconciliation and atonement, is achieved vicariously, that is on our behalf. As Colyer notes, this act of atonement takes place “within *our* actual humanity from birth, through life, death and resurrection” which then in turn becomes “all of *our* basic responses to God.”<sup>61</sup>

The fallen and vicarious humanity of Christ is thus essential for the recreation of that fallen human nature. Torrance argues,

It is only in Jesus Christ, however, that the Word or Son really becomes flesh, but in becoming flesh of our flesh he entered into our Adamic existence as a man made of a woman, made under the law. Within that continuity of Adamic existence, fallen existence, he is nevertheless true man, and true Son of God in true union with the Father. In his truth and obedience Jesus Christ breaks through the continuity of Adamic existence and opens up a new continuity in a new Adam, in a new humanity.<sup>62</sup>

Because Jesus came in solidarity with fallen humanity by assuming a fallen human nature it is possible to recreate that nature and, thus, for Jesus to be the second

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<sup>61</sup> Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 138. Emphasis mine. Kim helpfully points out the twofold significance of the vicarious humanity saying, “In the concept of Christ’s vicarious humanity, we find two points of extreme theological significance for Torrance: (1) human faith is grounded in the vicarious faith of Christ which underlies the doctrine of justification and (2) the vicarious humanity of Christ does not undermine individual and personal faith and response to God, but rather undergirds and intensifies them.” Kim, “Person, Personhood and the Humanity of Christ,” 96. Or to put it in the words of Torrance himself: “Jesus steps into the actual situation where we are summoned to have faith in God, to believe and trust in him, and he acts in our place and in our stead from within the depths of our unfaithfulness and provides us freely with a faithfulness in which we may share ... That is to say, if we think of belief, trust or faith as forms of human activity before God, then we must think of Jesus Christ as believing, trusting and having faith in God the Father on our behalf and in our place,” Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 82.

<sup>62</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 94.

Adam. Sin has dehumanized us and it is in this dehumanized humanity that the eternal Son joins himself to us to heal us. In other words, it is "in and through him, therefore, [that] humanity which has been dehumanised through sin, finds its true being and true human nature in union with God."<sup>63</sup>

It is on the grounds of Jesus' obedient life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension that our humanity is *personalized*. What this mean is that

in virtue of the fact that the Person who became incarnate in Jesus Christ is the creator Word of God by whom all men are made and in whom they consist, and is therefore the Person from whom all creaturely personal being is derived, the Incarnation must be regarded as creative, personalising activity.<sup>64</sup>

In order to understand what it means that our humanity was personalized, it is necessary to explain how it is that sin depersonalized our humanity.

Sin depersonalized our humanity in the sense that our person suffers from "a deeply set schizoid condition which regularly ... gives rise to insincerity and hypocrisy in us" in which we "become detached from what we actually are, so that it becomes a deceptive mask."<sup>65</sup> This problem results in a self-centered way of existence in which we are "cut off from genuine relations with others, so that the very personal relations in which persons subsist as persons are damaged and twisted."<sup>66</sup> It is into this dehumanized way of existence that Jesus becomes incarnate in such a way that he himself does not fall prey to this depersonalized way of existence, but rather he takes that way of existence and he "healed the ontological split in human being through the hypostatic and atoning union which he embodied within it."<sup>67</sup> In doing this he then "reintegrated image and reality in and

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 67–68.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 68–69.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 69.

through a human life" of perfect obedience and love.<sup>68</sup> Thus, our human persons are re-humanized in Jesus in the sense that "he redeems us from thralldom to depersonalising forces, depersonalising our human being in relation to himself and to other human beings."<sup>69</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It has been argued in this paper that Thomas F. Torrance's understanding of Jesus' assumption of a fallen human nature is essential to his understanding of the recreation and personalization of our human nature and person. I showed what Torrance means when he argues that Jesus assumed a fallen nature by giving clarity to definitions regarding the fallen nature and by clarifying the purpose of this assumption as atonement and not simply as a grounding for Jesus' full humanity. I then showed how this assumption of the fallen nature grounds the recreation of our human nature through the obedient life of Jesus. I concluded by showing how this act of atonement grounds the personalizing of our person in and through the personalizing person of Jesus Christ. This is not intended to be the end of this conversation by any means but is offered in a spirit of clarity and application as often this discussion of the fallen human nature is debated solely with respect to the plausibility of this view. I have attempted to show how this view is crucial to our understanding of anthropology and particularly the new humanity that Jesus created in his Incarnation and atonement.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. This has many ethical implications that are outside of the purview of this project. Jesus re-personalized us in both our vertical relations and horizontal relations. That is, our relations with God and our relations with each other. It is on these grounds that Torrance discusses the doctrine of the Church. He argues, "in light of the fact that as the Mediator between God and man Jesus Christ is the personalising Person and the humanising man, we look back at the doctrine of the Church, we may be able to see more clearly why the Church is not merely a society of individuals gathered together on moral grounds and externally connected with one another through common ethical ideals, for there is no way through external organisation to effect the personalising or humanising of people in society or therefore of transforming human social relations," *ibid.*, 71.



## **THOMAS F. TORRANCE AND PERSONALISM:**

### **Distinctions, Clarifications, and Paths Forward for Christian Anthropology**

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**Abstract:** *This introductory essay intends to begin a process of distinguishing the anthropology of T. F. Torrance from historical forms and definitions of personalism. We will note Torrance's intellectual relationship with some who are referred to as personalists, especially John Macmurray and Michael Polanyi. Torrance's theological anthropology, grounded christologically, was aided by employing their scientific and philosophical insights. Their epistemological and ontological methods assisted in formulating appropriate theological commitments. Having shed light on Torrance's methodology, we are then able to see the way forward for a trinitarian, scientific, personalistic anthropology. His strategy allows for the development of anthropology deriving from the "Personalising Person," which then informs a dynamic and relational anthropology. Having established a christocentric, realist starting point, the way is open to follow the Spirit to develop a creative and robust service for the church and a revitalized form of human flourishing.*

Marty Folsom, "Thomas F. Torrance and Personalism: Distinctions, Clarifications, and Paths Forward for Christian Anthropology," *Participatio* 9, "Theological Anthropology" (2021): 69-94. CC-by-nc-sa. #2021-MF-1.

## Introductory Parable

I came to the study of theology with an intense interest in understanding how God intends relationships to work. My question has been how to follow Torrance's intuitions to establish a proper starting point and sequencing that builds a proper theological anthropology. He consistently affirms that we must begin at the beginning with Jesus. If we start with the human, we launch a multitude of myths. If we start with the triune God, we enter God's dynamic context as the very source of personal life. This informs our tasks within the mission of God. This methodology enables us to explore the relativity of healthy relationships from within the field of God's personal life and not be seduced into the personalism that Torrance resisted. I will use a parable to distinguish the methodologies.

Imagine Thomas F. Torrance (we shall call him TF) on a quest, walking down the road to find the meaning of life in light of the God he has heard is revealed in Jesus. As he travels, he comes across a *carnival*. With a bit of indwelling of the setting, he apprehends that people come to this kind of event to find happiness for a day. They desire fulfilled human existence but are satisfied with what gratifies them in limited ways. The carnival grounds have many separated booths, meeting the perceived needs of human existence. Each booth markets to human sensibilities that spark interest for a moment. The fortune-teller discloses the future. The snake oil salesmen claim to cure ailments. The food vendors excite taste buds. The performers display an exceptional form of human morphology and capacities. Wonder abounds in the form of amusement — which means not thinking. Meaning is lost in the sensations of the moment.

TF discerns that the carnival is based on illusion and appearance. What is presented benefits the pockets of the providers. Vendors promise to meet human needs, yet they merely fulfill individuals with a temporary social and experiential enjoyment. Torrance finds this deeply troubling, lacking any power to provide long-term fulfillment for anyone. Magic, myth, and fascinating experiences are used to create a fantasy that lacks reality. Such is the way of idealists with big dreams and promises.

TF moves down the road and finds a *teaching, research hospital*.<sup>1</sup> Its immediate, tacit appearance is sterile and stark but scientific. He asks for a tour. This is granted. He finds himself discovering about humanity at another level. This institution is committed to human flourishing. The team of doctors and interns are specialists but have a working *interrelationship* so that they can care for the whole person. No one is a final authority; all are working together to learn and expand their knowledge. Each new patient becomes an opportunity to learn. A body of scientific understanding unifies the hospital, but intuitive attention is given to the particularity of each person. This creates frontiers for learning. While patients attempt to conceal causes for their condition with lies, the team works to discover the truth to bring healing. Their commitment is to engage reality as they find it, to explore the situational and systemic factors at play, and to develop strategies to save lives or restore health. A library of learning is consulted to investigate each current investigation. An attitude of open learning helps unravel the mysteries of undetected factors at play.

TF finds this an exciting enterprise. These doctors search for the truth of what impacts human well-being. They continually ask new questions and never claim to have all the answers. They work with reality as presented to them. The hospital works collaboratively, creating a body of insight to further skills in the broad field of health. TF leaves with a confident sense that these are his kind of people. They are not self-focused. They bring the good news of hope, employ scientific thinking to engage reality, and believe their work is about helping others. TF gladly indwells the moment.

In this short parable, we get a hint that the social sciences, which include personalism, begin in the wrong place, like a carnival. They bend to human sensibilities and desires. They blindly orient toward human longings, impairing the whole system. They are flooded with opinions and lack an appropriate conception of persons.

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<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge that not all research hospitals have all the characteristics I describe. I portray this hospital in a manner that reflects Torrance's intuitions for the purpose of a clarifying contrast. However, the more holistic the hospital, the closer it will correspond to my depiction that represents Torrance's thinking.

Torrance's work aligns with the teaching, research hospital. His anthropology centers on Jesus to understand the reality of persons and their ultimate well-being. He builds on a tradition of restoration, applying ancient wisdom to current situations. By employing this methodology, he participates in the unifying mission of the triune God, working toward renewing human health by functioning within God's creative and restoring work through Jesus.

Torrance is passionate about the field of the personal. By aligning with the God-human Jesus, he seeks to establish what it means to aim for the revitalization of life in every dimension. Thus, Torrance's theology functions to bring renewal and restoration, facilitated by the Holy Spirit, who brings us home to the Father's embrace and the wholeness emerging as God's work of transformation. As we will see, Torrance resists forms of thought that abandon the triune God or attempt to fulfill human existence through human effort, mentally or physically. Torrance rejects treating persons merely as independent individuals, the greatest myth of the modern world.

## **What is the Problem?**

Torrance resists impersonal modes of thought that think of persons as objects. That is a natural mistake, in that the study of personal relations easily turns to humans and observes. Trying to be "scientific" this means to see humans as objects. Further, Torrance does not want to employ any sort of subjective "lapse into 'personalism.'" That would be a bizarre contra-position to objectivism, falling into subjectivism. Both operate within the same radical dualism between subject and object."<sup>2</sup> Torrance rejects the "bizarre, subjective option" as a default to individual experience. Personalism, in all its forms, exhibits this Achilles' heel. Torrance asserts that we must learn to distinguish the *real* from the *subjective* otherwise "a gross personalism easily takes over in which people obtrude themselves into the place of God, making their own relations with God constitute the actual content of

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 133.

theological knowledge.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, theology morphs into an illusory form of anthropology. That is his main complaint against personalism.

Personalism is, in fact, a particular form of natural theology. This understanding builds on human observations and assessments of humans in their natural habitat then projects onto God. This is a selective endeavor based on the interests of the observer. Different personalist theorists will select different elements of human existence, particularly oriented toward the world of *thinking* (idealism) or the *material* world (physicalism, scientism, materialism). Torrance identifies both as forms of dualism that fracture our understanding of reality.

We may affirm the value of human ideals and dreams, but when those elements *replace* reality, they follow the idealism of Plato, diminishing the material and elevating abstract generalities. Personalists ardently support ideals for human existence. These ideals range from the singularity of an empowered, autonomous individual and extend to the multiplicity of utopian societies with communitarian practices. Personalism has multiple booths at the carnival.

Similarly, attending to human physical experience is valuable. But again, when the physical becomes the true actuality, we lose insight gained from the humanities. When all is reduced to physics and chemistry, Valentine’s Day loses all relational value, as does the Eucharist. Meaning becomes extinct as naturalistic science narrowly defines truth devoid of personal or divine insight.

Every form of anthropology in the modern university could be categorized as a form of personalism, some naturalistic (sciences) and some constructivist (humanities). Each engages elements of humanity, designated from the selective power of researchers who demarcate their field as physical, cultural, social, linguistic, or archeological anthropology. Each contributes knowledge but also

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “The Distinctive Character of the Reformed Tradition,” in *Incarnational Ministry: The Presence of Christ in Church, Society, and Family*, ed. Christian D. Kettler and Todd H. Speidell (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1990), 5. See also Torrance, *Theological Science* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), xiv, “The problem of modern theology ... is when the element of personal relation to God is not controlled by critical testing on the analogy of faith, it degenerates into a gross personalism in which we obtrude ourselves in the place of God, making our relations with God the sole content of theological knowledge.”

splinters our understanding of persons. They lack a holistic vision, an agreed starting point, and an Einsteinian sense of relativity.

Both the idealist and the materialist miss the place of the Creator God, known in Jesus, as their starting point. Their misstep leads to compartmentalizing with exclusivity in their study that becomes prejudicial. The naturalist rejects the discussion of meaning. The constructionist sees all reality as a construct of the human mind. Additionally, theological anthropology is dismissed as irrelevant or lacking a proper object. God is not seen as properly part of the natural world or a reasonable idea. But there is nothing more pertinent to the study by humans than to fully understand the science of the personal, acknowledging God's involvement in the natural world and informing human rationality. According to Torrance, neither the natural sciences nor the social sciences (including personalism) have succeeded in establishing a proper unified field of the personal.

Torrance was overtly committed to the study of the personal. This is demonstrated by Gary Deddo's essay "The Importance of the Personal in the Onto-relational Theology of Thomas F. Torrance."<sup>4</sup> Theological science begins with One God in three Persons, who creates and sustains his creation. Scientific theological thinking is made possible when God engages his creation as one of his creatures. Through him, God is known, as well as an understanding of his creatures. Jesus exegetes for us the original personal being of God, as well as the intention of God for his creatures. This is a proper starting point for anthropology. When missed, it leads to a carnival of attempts that entertain, amuse, idealize, or anesthetize humans. Torrance exercises a scientific, research approach to understand persons by beginning at the beginning with the personal God who creates them.

Torrance follows an Einsteinian/Polanyian scientific method. He rejects any form of scientism that excludes the personal, or is wholly naturalistic. He rejects personalism for engaging persons as a generalized class of individuals who relate, rather than attend to the particularity of persons constituted in relation. For Torrance, the object of study informs the appropriate method for study, in this case,

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<sup>4</sup> Gary Deddo, "The Importance of the Personal in the Onto-relational Theology of Thomas F. Torrance," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 143–60.

persons-in-relation. Persons, including God, must be studied in revelation, in relation, and response. Scientism operates in a manner akin to projection (as rejected in psychology), reading the observer's sensibilities onto the other. Scientism craftily creates a form of mythology, reflecting human interpretations of self and world into a theoretical system that is not true science and avoids proper contexts and methods for study.

Personalism caricatures persons when it reads onto human nature "what makes sense to human experience." As a stark alternative, I hope to reserve the term *personalistic*. This term will refer to an approach utilizing forms of thought that do not project but rather discover what is disclosed, utilizing scientific investigation specifically applied to persons. This occurs by appropriately engaging the unique nature of each person, including God. A personalistic mode allows learning in light of changing dynamics with persons in their contexts rather than working with established generalized truths.

Distinguishing between *scientific* and *scientism* clarifies a proper starting point and method in a manner that we may now use to distinguish *personalistic* and *personalism*. Scientific and personalistic are objectively informed by the object of study, where scientism and personalism default to subjective human agendas read onto the object.

In a carnival world of *personalism*, everyone is looking for their own sense of happiness or fulfillment, which may include other humans. In a *personalistic* world, we are searching for health, faithfulness to the truth, and responding to one another for the good of the whole.

## **What is Personalism?**

Torrance did not give us his definition of personalism. However, he hinted at its character when he connected it to the social sciences in general. We are looking at personalism in particular but will note similar features in existentialism, humanism, phenomenology, sociology, and other human-centered explorations. These philosophies affiliate with old paradigms indebted to the "cause and effect world" before Einstein articulated relativity.

Within personalism, there is a broad spectrum, maybe better described as *personalisms*.<sup>5</sup> In order to contrast with Torrance, we will highlight some common values of personalism.<sup>6</sup>

*All forms of personalism focus on the human.* This is central to personalism.<sup>7</sup> Humans are the object and starting point of study. Torrance would reject this proposal. It lacks concrete engagement with real humanity as found in Jesus. Personalism generalizes human experience to the point that it defaults to abstract ideas of humanity. When it does affirm that humans are relational, it further defaults to simplifications that become abstractions that are not particular or actually scientific. Concepts like love, freedom, and justice are subjectively conceived and vague in character. This cannot inform a theological anthropology. It misses God's concrete form of humanity in Jesus.

Personalists will generally agree that human persons are distinct from other animals, to be treated with dignity beyond material or biological natures. They would not affirm that humans are merely objects or animals.<sup>8</sup> They affirm Buber's I-It distinction, clarifying that a person ought not to be reduced to an It or considered as anything but a personal other, like Buber's I-Thou. For most personalists, God is not known personally in his own self-giving. God, like humans, is construed through human perceptions that miss God's unique being. Many personalists do hold to a

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<sup>5</sup> T. D. Williams and J. O. Bengtsson, "Personalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (revised May 11, 2018), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personalism>. See also the helpful discussion in Juan Manuel Burgos, *An Introduction to Personalism* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Jonas Norgaard Mortensen, *The Common Good: An Introduction to Personalism* (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2017), 22. Burrows suggest ten traits of personalism: 1) centrality of persons; 2) thoroughly idealistic; 3) theistic; 4) creationist; 5) freedomistic; 6) radically empirical; 7) coherence as criterion of truth; 8) synoptic-analytic method; 9) activist and dualistic epistemology; and 10) reality is through and through social and relational, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Christian Smith, *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010), 102.

<sup>8</sup> Williams and Bengtsson, "Personalism," 11, 20.



Christian theology, but they do not start with Jesus, the focal point of the scientific theology of Torrance. They begin with a set of human ideals.<sup>9</sup>

*Personalism focuses on human engagement with other persons.* Freedom means a fulfilled form of engagement. This freedom is pursued to ensure autonomy for the self and for the community of humanity at large. All humans experience themselves, not as an object, but as a subject which, from this internal sense of self, concludes that others are available for a form of personal connection. But for Torrance, this misses the basis on which freedom and fulfillment are made possible. He believes humans default to a natural desire for freedom as a form of self-interest and expression. However, Jesus' gift of freedom begins in a restored relation with the triune God. Humans are invited to participate with God, whose love forms the basis of human freedom. Torrance questions the intentions and values of humans left to their own ends in the pursuit of "freedom." Quite contrary to the norm, Torrance's understanding of Christian freedom involves participation and faith, dying to self and living in Christ.

*Human dignity is granted to all within personalism.* This affirmation is a given without explanation. From this belief comes the outworking of human rights and responsibilities, especially the individual rights that characterize western thought. These ideas lack a point of reference from which to clarify the meaning of human dignity. The field is left wide open to construct its meaning in a world rife with homelessness, prejudice, and oppressive systems. While dignity grants value, it still leaves the judgment to the influencers at the top to do the granting. For Torrance, we must affirm the value and dignity of all humans created in God's image as sons and daughters.

*Self-determination is a personal right and defining characteristic of persons.* For many personalists, this empowerment connects to being a thinker who can act morally. It assumes empowered people will act morally if not oppressed and

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<sup>9</sup> This is Torrance's concern with John Zizioulas. See Jason Radcliff, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Orthodox-Reformed Dialog* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018), 48 fn.45, also Radcliff states, "Torrance seems to think he [Zizioulas] is more of an existentializing dialectician than a theologian." Additionally, 104 fn.20, "Torrance accuses Zizioulas of an 'existentialising interpretation of the Greek Fathers.'" For Torrance, Zizioulas' relational thinking appears to be a human lens supplanting proper science.

marginalized. This furthers a vision of natural goodness in the human. Torrance assumes otherwise. Persons naturally act blindly or selfishly. Only the call to love others, from a renewed nature in Christ, can lead to a masterful sense of fulfilled personhood.

*Relationality is based on a life of nurtured connection and may include independence, but also values interpersonal fulfillment.* Being with others, especially friends, is a mark of the character of participation in what may be called communion.<sup>10</sup> The social nature of humans, which undergirds the social sciences, all are intermingled with personalism and its many cousins. Communication is a key feature of the give and take of this social intercourse, especially in portraying a human ideal of love. But should each person be allowed to do what is right in their own eyes? Personalism is vulnerable to this. Torrance believes we need the reality granted in Jesus to address all these issues for real connection and fulfillment.

## **A Brief History of Personalism**

Personalism may be seen to arise with ancient authors such as Aristotle, Athanasius, and Gregory the Great. There are clear signs of personalism in Thomas Aquinas, rooting the natural theology of *analogia entis* upon which Catholic personalists build. There is a long list of philosophers who point toward what became personalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the context of Torrance's work.<sup>11</sup>

While the term *person* may be traced back to Greek drama, where the actor wore a mask, an illusion of being another human, this was not to be the path for the early church. There, the one God was proposed to exist in three persons. Torrance appeals to this personal unity of God, rejecting the masks as modalism.

One might think that the nature of person as mask was only an ancient concept, but the quest for new identities, roles, and public personas reveals this "playing a part" continues in our times. The carnival of our era is filled with the masquerades of success, power, status, or saving face in the public eye. Torrance contended for a theologically constructed understanding of the person, drawing

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<sup>10</sup> Williams and Bengtsson, "Personalism," 16, 20.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, *What is a Person?* 99–100, fn.15.

from Christology and the nature of the Trinity. A proper theological anthropology must begin with the Creator and Redeemer of human existence, made visible in Jesus Christ.

In Torrance's mind, ancient philosophers like Boethius moved the discussion on personhood in a fracturing direction. The idea that a person exists with a "rational nature of an individual substance" is clearly based on human intuitions. It defaults to rational nature, categorizes a particular substance, and individualizes in abstraction outside the network of relations. These factors are dissimilar to Torrance's theological view of the person.

The first use of the word *personalism* is attributed to Schleiermacher in 1799.<sup>12</sup> Careful attentiveness to his theology is instructive as a contrast with Torrance. Schleiermacher begins with the human subject, with a warm pietistic religiosity of the self, who experiences feelings of dependence on God. God is personally present as one constructed by the intuitions of the self. As James B. Torrance said, "Schleiermacher's concern is not to say nothing about God; but to say nothing about him which does not relate to us."<sup>13</sup> Where Schleiermacher defaults to a kind carnival of subjective feelings in his phenomenological approach, Torrance pursued an objective basis for research. Torrance's understanding of personal being utilized a theological science appropriately attending to the self-revealing of God. Following Barth, he engaged in a personalistic study of Christ, grasped by the reality of this one who has given himself to us.

Since the Enlightenment, dehumanizing forces have been at work. This trend is manifested in revolutions, politics, industry, philosophy, and science. While claiming to fight for "humanity," they rush in individualistic directions. This results in each human looking out for their self-interest, shedding values of the past, including religion and especially Christianity. The inward turn to self-interest, and the elevation of the worth of the individual with self-determination, affirms the singular human. At the same time, it disengages us as related persons. We become isolated individuals. In this vein, Torrance resists figures such as Descartes, Kant,

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<sup>12</sup> Williams and Bengtsson, "Personalism," 3, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Ritchie, *T. F. Torrance in Recollection and Reappraisal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2021), 47.

Hegel, and others whose thinking disconnected humanity from God and one another.

Torrance investigates the loss of a true understanding of personhood, noting the fracturing assumptions that undergird personalism. He contends that all forms of dualism, atomism, and rationalistic thinking influence theories on the nature of persons, both divine and human. Torrance struggles for a corrective through theological thinking. For Torrance, all paths to human dignity and community outside Jesus are doomed to failure, and he has a circus tent full of examples.

A primary problem that led to the development of personalism was the emergence of a depersonalized society. Life in community was replaced by ideologies, economic systems, and institutions.<sup>14</sup> Mechanisms quickly developed that disrupted personal connection and maximized systemic control. Personalists arose to fight back.

Some forms of personalism arose in the twentieth century, concerned with inter-relations and solidarity in life together. The primary advocates formed circles identified as European Personalism and American Personalism.<sup>15</sup>

The European form, led by Emmanuel Mounier, was concerned to move from the centralized self to a position of being open to the other in a relationship, fulfilled for the good of all involved. These ideas, as well as the influence of Kierkegaard, brought value to the particular person. This led others to pursue the meaning of persons and their fulfillment in relationally affirming ways. Many contended for meaningful, personal existence as a minority voice, a worthy cause to support in a world of categorizations.

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<sup>14</sup> Mortensen, , *The Common Good*, 26.

<sup>15</sup>Andrew Grosso, *Personal Being: Polanyi, Ontology, and Christian Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 6 acknowledges a "Boston personalism," a "French personalism," a "Jewish personalism," an "Anglo-American personalism," and a "Roman Catholic personalism." In addition, one could include an "Eastern Orthodox personalism" and many forms of "Theological personalisms." Rufus Burrow, *Personalism: A Critical Introduction* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice, 1999), 34 suggests twelve types of personalism.

American personalism found its hub at Boston University, especially represented by Borden Parker Bowne.<sup>16</sup> This form was strongly affirmed as a “personal idealism.” Starting with the absolute value of the person, American personalists pursued the quest for a moral — and even theological life — to create a better world for the real, concrete individual. Martin Luther King, Jr., was trained in this tradition and exemplifies concern for persons in action. Torrance does not specifically confront the Boston School. Its basis appeared theological, but it was more invested in the fulfillment of the human personality with unique worth and dignity. For Torrance, it misses a valid affirmation of persons as grounded in relation to the triune God.

One could argue that all forms of the social sciences, psychology, and therapy exhibit a form of personalism. They each begin with the human, addressing their proper function and dysfunctions. They establish general norms of human thinking, feeling, and behavior, but lack a common consensus as to what constitutes a person.

The history of the study of humanity is strewn with images of mechanism (human as machine), progressing to the naturalism (human as animal), and moving toward the technological (human as computer), all trying to develop a “scientific” character. Even Murray Bowen’s family system thinking builds on an evolutionary model, developed in natural history and applied to family systems.<sup>17</sup> For Torrance, these kinds of modern studies reflect Newtonian and Darwinian paradigms. Thus, the humanities, and personalism in particular, got caught in old dualistic, fractured patterns of thinking.

Modern schools of thought dealing with persons lack clarity to determine a proper object of study, an appropriate, stratified method, a contingent history, and a holistic, scientific approach to form rational communities of inquirers.

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<sup>16</sup> Williams and Bengtsson, “Personalism,” 8, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory* (New York, NY: Norton, 1988).

## How Does T. F. Torrance Correct the Problem?

### Torrance and a Christocentric Anthropology of Persons

Science pursues reality as given. Reality discloses its nature to honest inquirers. For Torrance, this requires beginning with the personal reality of the triune God as Creator.

The Being or “I am” (οὐσία or Ἐγὼ εἰμι) of the Lord God *is* the ultimate divine Source of all his personal and personalising activity through Jesus Christ and in the Spirit, God himself acting personally in the Lord Jesus and God himself acting personally in the Lord the Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

Reality, as the givenness of God and his creation, is divinely ordered and includes human persons. The personal God providentially orders everything. Thus, a true science of persons must begin with the triune God. In the Bible, God is revealed as the original “I” who addresses humanity as “thou.” For Torrance, this relation of Creator to the created provides the context for meaningful study of human persons. When the Creator took on creaturely form, God privileged us to know him as a personal God, revealing who he is that we might know who we are.

Torrance builds his theological anthropology on the person of Jesus Christ. He is the one, true, unfallen human who is firstly God, and in the incarnation, becomes human. Torrance does not begin with any self-understanding of humans, or an ideal vision of humans and humanity. For Torrance, a proper personalistic understanding must begin with the being of the One God in three persons and the nature of their relation with their creature.

### Jesus as the Personalizing Person

Jesus is the human revelation of the personal, triune God. He comes to restore what was lost — personal relatedness. Jesus himself is the one who defines the

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 121.

human as person, and this excludes any starting point in personalism.<sup>19</sup> He comes as the humanizing human, restoring our true humanity as children of God. He is also the personalizing person who reconstitutes us from our alienation into an intimacy that restores what was lost.<sup>20</sup>

Jesus is uniquely a human person, as well as one of the three persons of the Trinity. He brings the personal life of God to us and brings us to share in the personal life of God. We become new creations in restored relation to him. Since personal relationships establish who we are, he is the one who can and has established a relationship of knowing and being known. This restores our true identity, knowing ourselves as beloved children of God. In this way, Jesus is the personalizing person.<sup>21</sup> Without him, we are less than what human persons were created to be. In relation with him, we are his new creations. Personalism starts with humans in their distinctness, not their relatedness, and thus deals with fragmented specimens of humanity living in a diminished state. Some forms of personalism hold a theory of God, but do not work from this specific, scientific starting point.

The Spirit is active in the dynamic of becoming personal, human beings:

Through the Freedom of his Spirit the Triune Creator is present to us in such an immanent way as to realise in our human existence the creative, reconciling and personalising power of the Word and Son of God incarnate in Christ Jesus the Light of the world, so that in our creaturely rationality enlightened by him we may *reflect by grace* but in an appropriately differentiated way, something of the uncreated

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith* (London: James Clark, 1959), xxxii. "It is Christ clothed with His Gospel who is the Truth, for this is unique Truth in which Christ's Person and His Message are inseparably one. It is this double character of Christian Truth which distinguishes it from all other truth. It is a Person, but in that it is also a message it is sharply distinguished from all personalism."

<sup>20</sup> Torrance, *Christian Doctrine*, 88, "God interacts personally and intelligibly with us and communicates himself to us in such a personalising way or person-constituting way that he establishes relations of intimate reciprocity between us and himself, within which our knowing of God becomes interlocked with God's knowing of himself."

<sup>21</sup> Torrance, *Christian Doctrine*, 161.

Rationality of God.<sup>22</sup>

The Spirit actualizes the mission of God into our particular lives, awakening us to *whose* we are, as we cry out, “Abba.”

The Spirit facilitates our lives in connection:

The personalising, incorporating activity of the Spirit creates, not only reciprocity between Christ and ourselves, but a community of reciprocity among ourselves, which through the Spirit is rooted in and reflects the trinitarian relations in God himself. It is thus that the Church comes into being and is constantly maintained in its union with Christ as his Body.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the personalizing person of Jesus is mediated to us by the personalizing of the Spirit who incorporates us into the personalizing life of the Church. We are not subsumed into the body of Christ; we are adopted members of the whole, valued for our particularity in the web of relations. Contrast this with the individuality of personalism. It becomes deflated, absent of the Holy Spirit who breathes life into the whole body and sustains each related part, and focuses on the spirit of the human in idealized forms. For Torrance, we exist as personalized persons, rooted in and sustained by the personalizing God, who has established the personal relatedness of our humanity.

### **What Does Onto-relational Mean for Theological Anthropology?**

We cannot use the term *person* as though it had any general content that could refer to God and humans alike. Humans have bodies as persons. The Father and Spirit do not. Person, when referring to God, must be used distinctly and inclusively of the Father, Son, and Spirit. These three exist in a bond of interrelatedness; each

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<sup>22</sup> Torrance, *Christian Doctrine*, 220.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, Second Edition (London: T&T Clark: 2016), 250–251.



cannot exist without the other in a mutually indwelling manner.<sup>24</sup> They are not separate beings who come together as one. They have their very being, their ontology, in their essential relatedness.

As humans, we naturally observe our bodies and think we are separable. However, we too exist as *persons* in our relatedness. Both God and derivatively humans, exist through being in relation. Torrance refers to this as *onto-relational being*. Referring to humans as God's creatures, we may speak of a similarity by analogy — remembering that divine being precedes and creates the human form. We cannot know the personal nature of God by looking at any human creature.<sup>25</sup>

### **Trinitarian, Scientific, Personalistic Anthropology**

To form an anthropology, one must begin with God and eventually think about humanity. Personalists sample from human existence. For Torrance, an adequate anthropology must begin with the only perfect human, Jesus Christ. In exploring who Jesus is, we acknowledge the personal context that establishes his identity. He is the Son of the Father, as revealed within the trinitarian life. There is nothing beyond or behind this context. We must think in a *trinitarian* manner for our primary interpretive context.

Thinking *scientifically*, we turn to discover reality in correspondence to God's personal being within a divine and contingent order. Scientifically means that the nature of the object of our investigation must be known in a manner appropriate for our object of interest. Thus, we must develop our thoughts attending to what is revealed by the personal God in order to understand the nature of personal existence.

The Christian understanding of the person in relation to the personalising activity of the Holy Trinity is then developed, and an account is offered of its relevance for the openness of our thought to

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<sup>24</sup> This refers to the important concept of *perichoresis*, depicting the unity and particularity within God's personal being. *Christian Doctrine*, 102. The term appears 43 times in this book as a reflection of its value in conceptualizing personal relatedness or onto-relational being as it originates in God.

<sup>25</sup> Torrance, *Christian Doctrine*, 160.

the inherent intelligibility of the universe and for a transcending of the critical splits within the personal and social existence of modern life.<sup>26</sup>

We must employ an open exploratory model to investigate the particulars of divine and human existence, understood in a holistic manner. We must utilize methodology appropriate to persons in their onto-relations. In being scientific, we must engage those to be known in a self-disclosing manner, and not allow our projections to inform our conclusions from *a priori* experiences and ideas, as is natural to personalism. We must be unfailingly scientific in discovering the nature of the personal.

To say Torrance is *personalistic* affirms that, within his scientific approach, he is openly informed by the other *as a person* and not as an object. Accordingly, *personalistic* as I am using it is narrowed to a specific, concrete, personal other. He begins with the most original and concrete other in Jesus.

Torrance is personalistic in the same way that he is scientific; he uses the tools of the trade, but allows the object of investigation (the triune God and his creature) to be known objectively. In that his object is personal, self-revealing, and speaks, he is personalistic in a Christian sense. With Torrance, the Church is invited to apprehend God through Jesus as a scientific community of mutually involved persons. When preparing to form a theological *anthropology*, our minds must be formatted by this self-revealing God. We come to know the true image of what a human is created to be, employing a trinitarian, scientific, personalistic anthropology beginning with Jesus as the revelation of the Trinity and humanity as God's beloved creatures.

## How does Torrance Utilize Selected Personalists?

Torrance engaged several thinkers in his work to clarify the field of the personal. These contributed key components to help him develop personalistic thought, not collapsing into complete personalism. We will note two, Michael Polanyi on epistemology and John Macmurray on ontology.

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<sup>26</sup> Torrance, *Reality*, xv–xvi.

## Polanyi

Michael Polanyi is referred to as a personalist<sup>27</sup> but has a questionable ontology of the person.<sup>28</sup> For Torrance, his contribution was in a personal epistemology, advocating that all knowledge is personal; it is the knowledge of persons. Scientific knowledge cannot be impersonally objective. A scientist intuitively indwells reality to discover the known as a knower. One is attentive and open to discover what is there and ought not to limit knowledge within the matrix of what is already known.

This scientist is positioned to begin *as* a human, but not necessarily for study *of* the human. For Torrance, Polanyi opened the visionary model of indwelling or investigating. Torrance recognized that personal knowledge could engage the personal God given in Jesus without collapsing into human generalizations or conclusions. Polanyi opened the door to stand before the eternal God but did not provide the tools to hear God's voice. But Torrance, as a theological scientist, could now stand with rational convictions regarding the field of the personal as properly included in reality. It is not required to default to the material, objective world in an impersonal manner, as had been the tradition of science.

Torrance used Michael Polanyi's scientific method because Polanyi overcame narrow, impersonal science and made room for persons to investigate as persons. Hence *Personal Knowledge* is about *how humans know* the world they indwell.<sup>29</sup> "The reality of human personhood was for Polanyi not only the motif by which he organized his understanding of knowledge, but also the means by which he began his inquiry into questions of language and reality."<sup>30</sup>

Torrance adopted Polanyi's recognition of the role of the person in the knowing process into theological science. But when inquiring into personal reality, Torrance departed from Polanyi. Torrance appreciated and applied much of the epistemology of Polanyi, but he did not follow him into his ontology of the personal,

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, *What is a Person?* 99.

<sup>28</sup> Grosso, *Personal Being*, 94–95.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>30</sup> Grosso, *Personal Being*, 29.

which Torrance assessed as beginning with human experience.<sup>31</sup> Torrance begins with God. Polanyi's pursuit continued as a study of the natural world, and he did not develop an ontology of personhood. Polanyi envisioned communities of "conviviality," acknowledging the importance of humans in a web of relationships.<sup>32</sup> However, for Polanyi, persons remained "responsible centers of commitment joined together in patterns of mutual influence."<sup>33</sup> Polanyi's concluding statement to *Personal Knowledge* gives more than hints:

We may envisage then a cosmic field which called forth all these centres by offering them a short-lived, limited, hazardous opportunity for making some progress of their own toward an unthinkable consummation. And that is also, I believe, how a Christian is placed when worshipping God.<sup>34</sup>

Torrance found in Polanyi a scientist who developed and employed tools to be scientific and personally engaged with the whole of reality without dualistic lenses. Polanyi could stand before God, but not take us to know God. Fortunately, Polanyi did not default to all the problems of personalism. Analogically, in our parable, he was a member of the research faculty in personal scientific epistemology. He opened the doors to research in a manner appropriate to the study of persons as a personal enquirer.

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<sup>31</sup> Torrance, *Reality*, 133–134. "All this does not of course imply some sort of lapse into 'personalism,' for that would be little more than a bizarre contra-position to objectivism, operating within the same radical dualism between subject and object. At this point I am unwilling to follow Michael Polanyi, at least in certain peripheral passages of his works, in taking over as much as he does from existentialist and phenomenological thinkers, for they are still tied up with the radical disjunctions which we have had to reject in pure science, and which Christian theology rejects in its doctrines of creation and incarnation."

<sup>32</sup> Grosso, *Personal Being*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 405.

## Macmurray

John Macmurray was a personalist but with distinctive features. He is the exemplar for a hopeful contemporary personalism.<sup>35</sup> Macmurray worked from God to the human, instructed by Jesus Christ as the clue to history.<sup>36</sup> He worked from the whole to parts in a manner that overcame dualisms.<sup>37</sup> He proposed the form of the personal as a field, much like Einstein's theory, and explored the dynamics of personal development within it.<sup>38</sup> He rejected the idealism of Descartes and Kant, the romanticism of Rousseau, the theories of Freud, the will to power of Nietzsche, and the naturalistic explanations of Darwin. He set out to disillusion humanity from these destructive, human-centered, dualistic, egocentric ways of thinking.<sup>39</sup>

T. F. Torrance said of him, "One other great thinker in our time can be compared to him in this respect [the integration of the natural and social sciences], Michael Polanyi."<sup>40</sup> Macmurray made great contributions to Torrance's personalistic thought on the ontology of the person and the field of the personal.<sup>41</sup> By beginning with humans as agents acting in the world who then reflect, he established a holistic sense of reality. This informs a reflective knowledge as we engage reality and think with reference to it. Thus begins a personal mode of being, nurtured in our existence from the time we are born. We exist and grow as persons in relation. We flourish when engaged in friendship and fail when fear creates resistance in our relationships. Macmurray formed a relational ontology of personal being. This

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<sup>35</sup> J. H. Walgrave, "Incarnation and Atonement," in *The Incarnation*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), 155 fn.14. "The best philosophical elaboration of that kind of personalism (an ambiguous word) has however been given by John Macmurray in his Gifford Lectures, *The Form of the Personal*, 2 vols., London, 1957 and 1961." This echoes in Torrance's Honor's List letter, where he speaks of Macmurray's "great Gifford Lectures." John Costello, *John Macmurray: A Biography* (Edinburgh: Floris, 2002), 423

<sup>36</sup> John Macmurray, *The Clue to History* (New York: Harper, 1939).

<sup>37</sup> John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber, 1995).

<sup>39</sup> John Macmurray, *The Search for Reality in Religion* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965)

<sup>40</sup> Costello, *John Macmurray*, 423.

<sup>41</sup> Marty Folsom, "John Macmurray's influence on Thomas F. Torrance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71 (2018): 339–58.

affects every aspect of human acting, thinking, relating and all forms of human society. In our parable, Macmurray was a member of the research faculty, working on the ontology of the personal.

## **Paths for Realigning Theological Thinking for Therapeutic Ends**

Torrance builds his theology on the interrelations within God's being. This aspect of God's life is called *perichoresis*, a term used to reveal God's eternal, internal relations, or God's onto-relations. Torrance expands this concept, saying,

While these onto-relations apply to our understanding of the Triunity of God in a unique and transcendent way, they also apply in quite another way on the creaturely level to the interrelations of human persons whom God has created for communion with himself, and which in their created way reflect the uncreated relations within himself.<sup>42</sup>

For Torrance, Jesus Christ singularly informs theological anthropology. He is not merely a perfect example; he sets the paradigm of thinking about humans being fulfilled in relation to the triune God and other humans. Jesus still lives in these relationships. Jesus' incarnation, atonement, resurrection, ascension, and all his ways of relating to God and humanity provide the context within which we may discuss both human failures and fulfillment. Jesus provides the ground of our grammar, informing our research and teaching. He embodies how humans are to function within God's purposes. For human freedom and flourishing to occur, we cannot merely observe Jesus; we must participate in his life. Personalists miss this point. The impact includes misunderstandings of who we are, how we are to exist, and the aim of human life.

Those personalists who are idealists make Jesus a *theorist* for human fulfillment. Jesus is seen as the original designer with the *idea* of human wholeness. This Jesus remains distant, relating to us through ideas. We are left to interpret what his intentions may be. This kind of personalist will see the theories of Jesus through a human perception of human needs. Consequently, "Jesus' theory" will

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<sup>42</sup> Torrance, "Distinctive Character," 9.

arise from human sensibilities, not Jesus. These show up in the theories of communism, socialism, individualism, spirituality, and other systems of human ideals. Jesus is personally absent, located somewhere else in a theoretically distant, divine place. From this view, what does the human think they need? Better thinking, reprogramming for a better theory to make their life work. At the carnival, there are many booths to promote these grand *ideas*.

Other more pragmatic personalists make Jesus into a *therapist*. Jesus is one who models and provides practical tools in managing our physical existence. Love and forgiveness become *techniques* we can use to meet human needs and transform human dysfunction. When things get really bad, Jesus is called in to provide practical advice to fix an observable problem. Once again, humans have set the agenda for the problematic issues. The personalist, in this case, is one who sees persons through a lens of cause and effect, part of a machine that needs fixing. Healing persons is achieved through learning skills to equip each person to do their part. Jesus coaches each person with their part, hoping that will heal the whole. Jesus becomes a temporary participant in the relationship. He fixes breakdowns, and then he leaves until the next visit. People look forward to the carnival each year to visit his booth to learn new *techniques*.

Finally, a trinitarian, scientific personalistic theologian brings the possibility that Jesus, with the Father and Spirit, joins us to our true *family*. This is *God's family*, and we need to grow in our relationship with this personal God and one another. They have been present and active all along. In our research, we find that Jesus is a daily companion, sharing life with the Father and Spirit, into which we are invited.

It is likely that we will discover we have had a trinity deficit disorder.<sup>43</sup> We have been doing life at a distance from the Trinity or with fragmented relationships. Walking with Jesus in the Spirit, we find this central relation to the Trinity impacts our loving and cooperating. A proper orientation and participation facilitates loving, active ways of being together as the family of the Father.

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<sup>43</sup> Marty Folsom, *Face to Face: Volume 3: Sharing God's Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016), 228–234.

As a family, we are friends. We do not expect anything other than what we mutually promise in love, even as we are being loved. When we fail, we ask forgiveness and seek restoration as we are being restored. Seeing each other as beloved persons, we live each day in ways appropriate to our daily settings. Participation is personalistic. We daily return to the ground and grammar of personal being. This is Jesus, who personalizes us by being personally part of our daily lives. Life together becomes a discovery process as we share in mutual conversation, activities, and serving each other. This is a life of research and teaching conducted within the personal presence of Jesus' mediating work.<sup>44</sup> Our wholeness is directly related to participation in the *family of God*.

## Conclusion

Thomas F. Torrance is a trinitarian, scientific, personalistic, theologian. He points the way toward a deeper understanding of persons, a theological anthropology. His work informs theological research to facilitate the restoration of persons without the pitfalls of personalism. He provides an anthropology grounded in Jesus, creating the context for a research hospital committed to the restoration of humans as the outworking of this trinitarian, scientific, personalistic theology. "Therapeutic" work cannot begin with specific or generalized humanity but must carefully function within the paracletic ministry of Jesus and the Spirit to redeem and restore relations, not engaging the individual as in a psychological model.

With the Trinity as our family of origin, from which all human relating is derived, we have a possible context for a *trinitarian family systems therapy*. That pursuit might work out the function and dysfunction of humans in relation to God and other humans.<sup>45</sup> This must be based on God's intentions and not on human ideals or pragmatics.

Acknowledging the Trinity's faithful, covenanted way of life with humanity, we have a basis for exploring healthy attachment with God. In seeking God's

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Folsom, *Face to Face: Volume 3*, see discussion in Chapter 9, "Puzzle Pieces: Trinitarian Theology and Family Systems Therapy," 307–64.



reconciliation, we follow how God has overcome our alienated life in the flesh. This acting in faith seeks an understanding through a theological *attachment therapy*. We learn to pay attention to our detachment from God and each other. Then, following Torrance's scientific thought with caution, we may consider therapeutic concepts. These must exhibit a mentality that serves God and all those God loves, in modes that resonate with God's heart for healing humanity.

Having established the faithfulness of God in creating and sustaining our humanity, we are able to assess what happens when humans miss the call to honest participation in God's communion. These take the form of many *addictions*, the idols we create when missing God's will for a shared life. The divine, relational cure requires dying to self and living in Christ. Human resistance reveals our human, dysfunctional diseases. We may now understand addictions as symptoms of the loss of a true connection with God and other human beings.<sup>46</sup> Renewal comes as we are restored in relation to the one who created us, not through programs designed to deal with symptoms. The goal is to no longer follow the lies, the self-medication, or the idols that falsely replace fidelity in response to the love of God at work in our lives. Anthropology is not a study of static humanity; it includes the renewal of our humanity according to the image of the one who made us (Colossians 3:10). The renewal of the mind, the restoration of the heart, and the call to love our neighbor are all valid therapeutic pursuits within this goal of aligning with and participating in God's mission in the world.

Torrance creates a theological paradigm that, when properly maintained, provides the basis for a research hospital. He does not abandon humans to every carnival or carnal mode of self-care.

The problems within personalism are not to be denied. However, the contributions of the social sciences may need to be recontextualized within the context of this personalistic research paradigm, as Torrance believed was possible. This begins by dealing with the infectious nature of wrongly established thinking about God and the human. We need critical realism to return to reality. This begins by acknowledging that God exists in a relationship and does everything for the

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<sup>46</sup> Marty Folsom, *Face to Face: Volume 1 Missing Love* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013), chapters 6–7.

purpose of the relationship. The theologian and the Church may both contribute to the healing of humanity as we follow Jesus in his mission, restoring relations as the Spirit works through us.

Thomas F. Torrance had every reason to be concerned about the abuses and wrong thinking of personalism, just as he resisted dualistic problems in science. It is time for a revolution in the social and theological sciences. Torrance pointed the way forward, even as he warned of the past. The future is full of possibilities. Jesus goes before us and with us. By his Spirit, Jesus fulfills in us what is in the heart of his Father, extending the Kingdom of God for human flourishing in sharing God's life.

## **RESISTING REDUCTIONISM:**

### **Why We Need a Truly Theological Anthropology to counter the Dehumanization of God's Humanity**

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**Abstract:** *Many contemporary Christian theologians have recognized the need for an explicit and thoroughly theological anthropology. The loss of the truly transcendent Triune Creator and Redeemer God revealed in Jesus Christ threatens the loss of humanity and human community in the church and in the world. This essay contends that the most fundamental challenge arising in our post-Enlightenment, indeed, post-Christian western and westernized cultures does not consist in the divergence or even disintegration around matters of morality/ethics, or social, economic, scientific, technological or political issues. Rather, the most fundamental matter involves the reductionistic apprehension of the human being, en se. Both Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance recognized this reductionistic danger of the dehumanization and depersonalization of humanity in our modern world. To address it they laid a christological and trinitarian foundation for an essentially theological anthropology. Ray S. Anderson was one of the first English-speaking theologians to build most squarely upon that foundation in order to counter that imminent collapse. This essay surveys and comments on the breadth and depth of Anderson's development of Barth and Torrance's theological*

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*anthropology as represented in his 1982 groundbreaking book, Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology — and offers it as an indispensable contribution to the monumental task of resisting reductionism in our day, first in the One Church of Jesus Christ, and then, by the grace of our Triune God, in this fallen world.*<sup>1</sup>

In 1982, Eerdmans published Ray S. Anderson's groundbreaking book, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*.<sup>2</sup> The rich veins of reflection opened up in that work are deep and continue to yield fruitful theological insight and inform the practice of ministry. The wealth of that work has not yet been exhausted. This essay is meant to assist in further exploration of it especially as it pertains to the depersonalizing and demumanizing trends, influences and forces perpetually impinging upon our world.

Anderson's work, of course, did not arise *de novo* out of thin air but stood on the shoulders of many who preceded him by way of both critical engagement and constructive development.<sup>3</sup> One of those which should not be overlooked, is Thomas F. Torrance, the supervisor of Anderson's doctoral work and an endorser of his *On Being Human* book. Here's Torrance's endorsement:

Biblically grounded, sparkling with fresh insights, this is the most perceptive and incisive work on theological anthropology to appear for a long time. No student, no pastor, no theologian, no Christian psychiatrist should be without this book, for it will open up for them hitherto unprobed depths and offer them ways of grasping more

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on the draft version of the essay "Resisting Reductionism; Why We Need a Theological Anthropology," which was originally published as Chapter 8 of *On Being Christian... and Human: Essays in Celebration of Ray S. Anderson*, ed. Todd H. Speidell (Eugene, OR, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> To which the "Bibliography of Works Cited" and the "Index of Names" of that single volume bears ample witness. Following suit, some reference will be made in this essay to the works of those he cited and also to others who preceded or wrote after Anderson published his volume.

profitably what it really means to be a human being.<sup>4</sup>

While Torrance is not extensively cited in this particular volume, Anderson's comprehensive awareness of Torrance's writings can be rightly assumed not only on the basis of his studying under TFT, but by his teaching, other writings, and most especially Anderson's edited volume, *Theological Foundations for Ministry*. Anderson included eight essays from Karl Barth and six from Tom Torrance, which he notes together make up about half of the 775-page long tome. Anderson's 2001 publication of *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis*, bears further witness to this development by his alignment of his entire project with a touchstone retrieved from Torrance's *oeuvre* cited in the "Preface" and by references throughout this volume. Anderson provides an extensive quotation indicating the profound connection Torrance and he see between Jesus Christ (Christology) and all human beings (anthropology) taken from Torrance's 1966 essay, "Service in Jesus Christ."

The Church cannot be in Christ without being in Him as he has proclaimed to men in their need and with being in him as He encounters us in and behind the existence of every man in his need. Nor can the Church be recognized as His except in that meeting of Christ with Himself in the depth of human misery, where Christ clothed with his gospel meets Christ clothed with the desperate need and plight of men.<sup>5</sup>

*On Being Human* mostly draws from Karl Barth's writings with over 50 main references. However, given the known inter-relationships between Barth, Torrance, and Anderson and the actual content of their central themes, both theological and anthropological, it should come as no surprise that they overlap and that Anderson keys off both of them. My own research and reading, including my own doctoral

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<sup>4</sup> From the back cover of the Eerdmans, 1982 first printing.

<sup>5</sup> Quotation from Torrance cited in Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 8. The original citation can be found in Thomas F. Torrance, "Service in Jesus Christ," in *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on his 80th Birthday*, ed. James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker (London: Epworth Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 1–16. It is also reprinted in Ray S. Anderson, ed., *Theological Foundations for Ministry* (T&T Clark, 2000), 724.

thesis<sup>6</sup> and editorial work, has amply confirmed that Anderson's theological anthropology is firmly grounded on the same biblical, and trinitarian theological foundation as were the less extensively developed works of Barth and Torrance on that theme with which he was very familiar. While it is not my intent to demonstrate such a thesis, I trust this essay will give, even if only incidentally, ample evidence that Anderson's anthropological work is clearly aimed at the same target that both Barth and Torrance recognized: the danger of a damaging reductionism of human persons in thought, act, relations and being. And as one of the first to further that very task, I believe Ray Anderson ought to be recognized as one of the key contributors to this crucial and ongoing program of a christological and trinitarian theological anthropology given the impetus conveyed by his own two primary mentors to all his works, most especially concentrated in his book, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*. It would be remiss to overlook his contribution.

Furthermore, it is my conviction that the most fundamental challenge arising in our post-Enlightenment, indeed, post-Christian western and westernized cultures does not consist in the divergence or even disintegration around matters of morality, or social, economic, and political issues. The most fundamental matter underneath all of these involves the loss of what we mean by being human. I believe a review of all of Ray Anderson's pertinent efforts to formulate a truly theological anthropology would be more than just salutary, but renewing and regenerating, first for the One Church of Jesus Christ, and then perhaps for others.

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<sup>6</sup> For the published version, see Gary W. Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological and Human*, now published in two volumes (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2015).

But for this short essay, I will have to limit myself to only one of Anderson's books, one clearly indebted to both Karl Barth and Tom Torrance.<sup>7</sup>

The significance of Anderson's work in theological anthropology lies not just in the nature of what he published in 1982 (and subsequently) but also in the trajectory which US society, and indeed Western culture, has traversed these past, now four, decades. If the twentieth century chronicles Western culture's loss of God, it seems likely that the twenty-first century may very well be characterized as the subsequent loss of humanity. While there were those in the previous century who valiantly claimed that a humanism without God in the way was all that was needed for human thriving, this present century may indeed expose the impossibility of that possibility. As Karl Barth said, and Anderson's work reflects, there is no such thing as a godless humanity.<sup>8</sup>

As consensus about the nature of humanity seems to grow ever more remote, the escalating public debates on issues such as abortion, euthanasia, reproductive technologies, genetic engineering, and sexuality look intractable. Even the lingering discussions of decades past concerning contraception, the death penalty, mental health, racism, and the nature of gender, marriage and family have eluded final resolution. Not only do these unresolved issues disturb the societal

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<sup>7</sup> The central overlap between Anderson and Torrance's theological anthropology can be found by tracing out the latter's discussions of the Trinity's "personalising" and "humanising" of human persons. See these references to Torrance's discussions, *Reality & Evangelical Theology: The Realism of Christian Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 43–44; *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 1996, 119, 160; "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective" in *Religion, Reason and the Self: Essays in Honour of Hywel D. Lewis*, ed. Stewart R. Sutherland and T. A. Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989), 116; *The Mediation of Christ: Evangelical Theology and Scientific Culture*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992), xii; "The Christian Apprehension of God the Father," in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 141–142; *Test-Tube Babies: Morals, Science, and the Law* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1984), 11; *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, Vol. 1., ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 90–91. For an overview of Torrance's concentration on this topic see also Gary W. Deddo, "The Importance of the Personal in the Onto-relational Theology of Thomas F. Torrance," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), 143–160.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 136 and III/4, 625.

peace outside the church, but they also perturb the fellowship of the church itself. At the vortex of these controversies lies the mystery of human being.

The present context desperately calls for a profound and robust anthropology. Without a firm grasp on the nature of humanity, we face the prospects of what C. S. Lewis called “the abolition of man,” in a book of the same title. If the church as the church of Jesus Christ is to address its own internal challenges as well as offer the surrounding culture the best it has to offer, it cannot afford to provide anything less than a truly theological anthropology. In this brief essay I would like to highlight several crucial aspects of Ray Anderson’s legacy of a theological anthropology that we must build upon if we are to address the powerful dehumanizing trends of thought and action growing around and among us — the same foundation and aim of both Karl Barth and Thomas Torrance. For that foundation seems to me to hold great promise for responding to the ever-growing challenge of discerning the true outlines of humanity in this present twilight.

## **A Truly Theological Anthropology**

Unfortunately, it is still not unusual to hear even from pastors the warning: “Now let’s not get too theological!” Theology has a bad name. And perhaps it deserves it, for the sheer volume of divergent forms of what has passed for theology is mind-numbing. Adding to the confusion is the fact that there seems to be considerable disagreement as to what constitutes good theology, which can lead to skepticism about all theology. In response to this challenge, the church and its leaders will not fare well by offering anything less than a thoroughly and truly Christian theology. What Ray Anderson offers is a serious contender for a theology worthy of that title. But what are the distinctives of such an essentially Christian theology of human personhood? In what follows I offer my own interpretation of lessons gleaned from Ray Anderson’s work. It will become obvious that I along with Ray am also indebted to the profound thought of Karl Barth, T. F. Torrance and James B. Torrance on these matters.



## Revelational and Christological

A *theological* anthropology must first of all be essentially oriented to its proper subject, God. Ludwig Feuerbach, in the nineteenth century, scoffed at such a human possibility. He prophesied that the only possibility was for human beings to project themselves on to a cosmic screen and call it God. Indeed, a theological anthropology must acknowledge the human propensity to justify itself by creating gods after its own image. It must also admit that if there is to be any true knowledge of God, such knowledge will first of all be a divine possibility, not a human potential. As Karl Barth wrote in his foreword to Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, God is the great iconoclast who knocks over our idols by setting up his own divine image in their place.

Awareness of this propensity is not the achievement of postmodern insight. It was announced in no uncertain terms in ancient Israel's strict prohibition and continual warnings about idolatry, setting up false images. Enshrined in those negative commands God reserved for himself only the right to provide a true image of himself. The gospel acknowledges this human bent while announcing that in Jesus Christ God has indeed accomplished a *self*-revelation which brings us to repentance and so brings an end to our self-justifying ways. Jesus Christ has given us access to a true knowledge of God which calls into question all other images of God. If there is to be a truly theological anthropology, we must begin with Christology. God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ is our only hope of being rescued from idolatry and so from exchanging the glory of the divine for self-justifying image of the creature.<sup>9</sup>

But there is a crucial second reason that a theological anthropology must be christologically oriented. If humanity is to escape its own propensity for self-justification, it must also have access to an image of *humanity* that is not merely a reflection of itself. This is especially true if there is something seriously amiss with humanity as a whole and in its particulars. If there is no north star to orient the ship of humanity, then we are condemned to navigate ourselves by some dim light perched atop our own mast. The gospel comes to us yet again as good news that in

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<sup>9</sup> See Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human*, Chapter 1.

Jesus Christ we have not only the revelation of God but also of true humanity. Jesus is the new Adam, both the origin and destiny given to us by the grace of God.<sup>10</sup> He is our only hope of being rescued from the gravitational force of human self-centeredness, being curved back in on ourselves (*incurvatus in se*), as Martin Luther put it. In Jesus Christ we have the revelation of true God **and** true humanity. Our theological anthropology must bear no uncertain witness to this reality.

We must clarify this point to avoid misunderstanding. The Incarnation does not essentially establish the grounds for declaring that Jesus is human just like us. Rather the direction of comparison is the reverse: in Jesus Christ we see who we really are. It is not that he is like us, but that we are to be like Jesus Christ. Any *imitatio Christi* will be the fruit of *participatio Christi* and not the other way around. And the direction of comparison cannot be subsequently reversed. The church cannot make the mistake of assuming that we know what humanity is and then placing Jesus Christ under cross-examination to see if he measures up. Nor can we look to Jesus for mere empathic identification with us as we are and presently understand ourselves. Doing so would only lead us once again into the temptation of self-justification and would propel us towards crucifying him again. Jesus Christ is the revelation of a humanity that we are not entirely familiar with. Although Jesus comes to be with us and accept us as we are, he comes not to leave us there but to take us to where he is going, where we have never been. The Incarnation is not God's permission for us to wallow in self-pity and make excuses for ourselves and our sorry condition because we have been "only human." The truth is that we have been less than human. Human existence has been corrupted by the evil of sin which is alien to humanity. The only escape from our fallen and unnatural condition and so absolute servitude to such pitiful self-justification is submission to the self-revelation of God and humanity in Jesus Christ, for he alone is the one both consubstantial with God and consubstantial with us, as we hear announced at Chalcedon. Jesus Christ calls us not only to repent of our images of God but also of our self-made images of humanity. For in him we see true God and true humanity.

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<sup>10</sup> See Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) for a well-done exposition of the two themes of origin and destiny in Christ.

### **Incarnational and Relational**

What this means is that a truly theological anthropology, along the lines forged by Ray Anderson, will resist all manner of reductionisms. It first of all resists being reduced to mere cultural or philosophical anthropology. But it seems to me that there are indeed many other forms of reductionism that also threaten the enterprise. What follows is really an exploration of how a truly theological anthropology will expose those reductionisms for what they are and uncover the true nature of humanity.

The first and most devastating reductionism tempts humanity to know itself autonomously, that is, apart from the self-revelation of the triune God. Such approaches may or may not be atheistic. But the question of God in connection with humanity becomes secondary, ancillary, optional. They assume that humanity can at least be sufficiently understood for all practical purposes in terms of the disciplines of physics, biology, psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology. Religion need not be denied, but only subsumed under the category of one object of the investigation of the phenomenon of the human. Such approaches exhibit total confidence in a "bottom-up" approach to investigating humanity. Yes, some will want to pursue what eventually comes into view at the religious "top" of such explorations. But others will be just as content to stop short of the question of God, since all who approach from this direction agree upon the location of the essential aspects of human existence and anything more could only identify something particular, peculiar, esoteric, and subjective and so irrelevant to humanity in general. Consideration of God in relation to humanity certainly could not be set forth as a matter of knowledge.

This is the danger of a methodological naturalism in anthropology. One's methodological approach will color, constrain and most likely control what one says and understands "at the top," for it will be built on a foundation already laid. A methodological naturalism can only warrant a metaphysical naturalism. A theological anthropology will not dismiss or deny such investigations, but it will build from the top down, that is, with the recognition that the essence of humanity is determined in relation to God and on the basis of the revelation of humanity. Other investigations will indeed have their own contributions to make even if

pursued from the bottom up. However, such explorations cannot be given autonomous explanatory power. Furthermore, as opposed to bottom up naturalistic explanations, assuming the truth of divine revelation will not be regarded as a subjective bias that distorts the investigation. Rather, revelation will be regarded as providing the proper objective and subjective starting point for approaching the knowledge of humanity. The knowledge of humanity conveyed in revelation will provide the objective starting point. The proper orientation of humility and receptivity before the revelation will be understood as the only proper subjective orientation required by the knowledge of humanity normatively given through that revelation. Objective knowledge of God's humanity requires a certain subjective posture of humility and trust and commitment to the content of the revelation given.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin is often misunderstood in this connection. Yes, he rightly saw that the knowledge of God and humanity are intimately connected. But he did not believe that one could start with either object and end up the same place. The knowledge of God in Christ was primary for Calvin. Furthermore, Calvin never consented to approaching humanity in a way that was autonomous from a knowledge of God.<sup>12</sup> Calvin cannot be used to justify such inversions, reductionisms.

Now our language about knowing humanity from "above" and "below" can be misleading. By "from above" we do not mean apart from our creaturely existence. We mean, on the basis of God's self-revelation. But that revelation came from above to meet us below. In Jesus Christ "above" came into view "below" giving us access to God's own knowledge of humanity within our human sphere. We know humanity in the humanity of Jesus Christ.

### **A Christological Orientation**

What do we discover about humanity in Jesus Christ? That in essence humanity has no origin, existence, meaning or destiny except in deepest connection with God

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<sup>11</sup> See Michael Polanyi *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), for the discussion behind this affirmation.

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, new edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit.<sup>13</sup> Jesus Christ is who he is by being completely one with God and one with humanity. Jesus has no being except by being entirely from, with, and for God and humanity in all that he is, says, and does.<sup>14</sup> In Jesus Christ we see true human being as one who is completely oriented to intimate and involved communion with the Father in the Spirit. The Gospel of John, especially chapters 13-16 and culminating in chapter 17, provide profound insight into how Jesus' identity in act and being was constituted by his *relation* to the Father in the Spirit. He was one with the Father and the Spirit and desired no life outside of that sphere of communion. It is really impossible to imagine Jesus turning to the Father in prayer and, while thanking him for all his love and fellowship, nevertheless reminding the Father of his need to have his own "space" and requesting that he be allowed to go off so as to find his real self and calling and identity. His humanity was entirely oriented to being in relationship with his heavenly Father.

Jesus is the incarnate Son of God united to the Father by the Spirit. Jesus is entirely caught up in this being-in-communion. So much so, that we could say that his whole ministry towards others was to take them to the Father and send them the Spirit so that they would be included in that very fellowship he had with the Father in the Spirit. In Jesus we see that humanity has its being by being in communion with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The very shape of that communion is revealed in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul noted that when the Spirit of Jesus comes upon us, we call out in a way which echoes Jesus' own prayer, "Abba, dearest Father." Consequently, when we are baptized, we are baptized in the one name: Father, Son, and Spirit for that marks our new identity as those united to Jesus Christ. Salvation itself is sharing in the Son's own communion with the Father in the Spirit.

### **The Humanism of God**

Such a revelation calls into question every attempt to ascertain the true nature and destiny of humanity apart from its essential connection to the God. For there is no

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<sup>13</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, Chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> See Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 140–198, 209 for an exposition of these simply profound propositions.

humanity apart from or outside of that reality and relationship established in the Incarnate One. Humanity is essentially shaped, determined by the election of humanity to be the humanity of God through the gracious hypostatic union of God and man in Jesus Christ. Autonomous humanity is a fiction, a lie, a deception. There exists now, through the new and true Adam, no other humanity than God's own humanity. That's what Barth called the humanism of God!<sup>15</sup>

A determination that reaches to such ontological depths and eschatological horizons poses no threat to a personal independence or differentiation. Being the Son of the Father was no threat to the personal identity and life of the Son. Rather that relation establishes and secures the proper distinction between Father and Son. This relational reality carries with it its own logic — the logic of God's own covenant love. Human being is essentially a being-in-relationship, a being-in-loving. Relationship with God is essential to human being, not ancillary or optional. God and humanity are not ontological opposites incapable of communion. Rather, as C. S. Lewis says, humanity was made to "run on God" in a way analogous to a car and gasoline.

Ontologically those educated in the tradition of western philosophy have a difficult time grasping at the deepest level of being the nature of this union in a way that does not obliterate the personal difference. To locate this problem philosophically we could say that within an Aristotelian substantial ontology (reinforced by Newtonian physics, Cartesian metaphysics, and modern Deism, naturalism and solipsism) relations can only be regarded as accidental, optional, or non-essential to human being.<sup>16</sup> In this framework, the ontological significance of relations necessarily reduce in either of two directions. Either the two essentially differentiated things cannot have real union and remain essentially separate; the relation between them remaining accidental and extrinsic. Or, upon union, the

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<sup>15</sup> See Karl Barth, "The New Humanism and the Humanism of God," *Theology Today* 8 (1951): 157–166, translated by Friedrich L. Herzog.

<sup>16</sup> See especially the many publications of Thomas F. Torrance on this theme including: *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*; *Divine and Contingent Order*; *The Christian Frame of Mind*; *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons*; and the essays "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," and "The Soul and Person in Theological Perspective."

differences become obliterated by the essential union. Given A and B in relation, either A is swallowed up by B, B is consumed by A, or AB really becomes one altogether new thing that is properly identified as C. Individuated substances, especially mechanically construed, are what they are by being indivisibly autonomous, that is outside of all relationship. A theological anthropology radically calls into question such an atomistic anthropology.

Considered in a more psychological way we often perceive only two options within relations: either fleeing or fusing. We feel we either must have personal autonomy and remain essentially untouched by another and so stay in self-control (and maintain control over others) or we must lose ourselves and become submerged in the other.<sup>17</sup> Of course, neither of these options seems entirely satisfactory, so that much of fallen human life can be seen as a wild and even destructive oscillation between these two alternatives.

The self-revelation of God and humanity in communion shows a different way forward, the way of covenantal love of union and communion. This is the theo-logic of *agape*. We are who we are essentially by first being in relation with God. The quality of our life is foundationally and eternally conditioned by the shape of our participation in that relation. And right relation is no threat to our true individuality, for we are created to be and become in and through covenantal relationship.

Nothing is more crucial than to grasp and re-grasp the essential and particular relational shape of humanity given to it in Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> Bad habits of the Western mind (the Eastern mind has its own problems, but let's deal with the log in our own eyes first) must be overcome if we are to work out a theological anthropology. It is a relentlessly uphill battle, for our default position is that relationships, yes, even with God, are optional, non-essential rather than constitutive of our being. *Metanoia* (repentance of mind) is required to affirm joyfully that being itself is a constantly given gift that we cannot give ourselves. We are not Energizer bunnies with our own built-in being-providing batteries. God alone

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<sup>17</sup> Some of this thinking is reflected in the terminology of "engagement" and "enmeshment" in systems theory.

<sup>18</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, Chapter 4, for this theme.

is self-existing. All else exists by virtue of the gift of being — freely given by God for the sake of communion with God and then with others.

### **Trinitarian Shape**

The relational shape of creation, especially in its form of humanity as revealed in the Son of God incarnate, is grounded ultimately in the very triune being of God.<sup>19</sup> For in Jesus Christ we find that the very being of God is not a monad, an unvariegated mass of divine substance, but a unity, namely a unity of Father, Son, and Spirit. The oneness of God is a communion, not undifferentiated and monolithic stuff. Relationship of holy love is essential, internal, and eternal to the triune God. There is ontological room for loving in the inner life of the Trinity long before there is a creation. There is holy space for a real exchange of glory, life and covenant love in the triune life. The Father eternally gives out of his person the Son's sonship and the Son gives back out of his person the Father's fatherhood all in and through the Spirit who both gives and receives from the Father through the Son. God is in this way a living and loving God from all eternity, one in being (*ousia*) — three in person (*hypostasis*).

Commensurate with who this God is, it should be no surprise (in hindsight!) that creation was created for union and communion which reflects the very triune character of God. It should make perfect sense, then, that the whole of human responsibility can be captured in the two dimensions of love commanded towards God and neighbor. What else would a triune God like this essentially command? What else would essentially glorify such a God? What else would image and bear witness to this triune God?

### **A Communion with Others**

Our Christology already indicated that Jesus Christ was essentially the One from God who was from, with and for God *and* humanity. Jesus Christ is who he is also in relationship to others. In Christ, God extended himself to others in self-giving love. So, as we live out our communion with the triune God we too, in imitation of God's own free and loving acts of creation, Incarnation and redemption, should extend

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<sup>19</sup> This concern can be found throughout the opening chapters of Anderson, *On Being Human*, 36, 49, 76, 85, 114, 118, 121, 175, and 182.



our communion out to include others. Humanity has its being by being in relationship with God and with others.

It is no wonder, and yet a profound mystery, that the church itself, then, must first of all be regarded as a communion of persons. The early church grasped its trinitarian nature when it regarded itself as being an icon of the Trinity. The divine pattern of love was to be imaged among us as a witness to its divine constitution.<sup>20</sup> Humanity was created for union and communion in a holy love through sharing in the very triune life: partial and imperfectly now, but entirely and eternally in its consummation. For salvation itself in Jesus Christ is nothing other than sharing by grace in his perfect union and communion with the Father and the Spirit. By sharing in the Son's very own sonship we thereby really become the children of God. In the words of Scottish preacher and novelist George MacDonald, God in Jesus Christ "brothers us."<sup>21</sup> When we extend communion to others as the people of God, it reflects the very communion of the triune God.

### **Human and Creaturely**

So on the one hand we should guard against reducing the divine to the human, and on the other hand reducing humanity to the creaturely dimension.<sup>22</sup> So much theological discussion about the nature of humanity created in the image of God has made foundational the difference between humans and other creatures. The capacity for reasoning and self-awareness have most often been identified as the distinguishing marks of the human being.<sup>23</sup> While a theological anthropology will certainly distinguish between animals, even the higher ones, and humans, has this comparison really identified the *humanum*, that which truly distinguishes the human creature from all others? Anderson, following the lead of Karl Barth, thinks not. For two negative reasons and one positive reason.

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<sup>20</sup> See Timothy Ware [Bishop Kallistos], *The Orthodox Church*, rev. ed., (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 239.

<sup>21</sup> See George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, Series 2, "Abba Father", 129.

<sup>22</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, Chapter 2.

<sup>23</sup> See Karl Barth's important discussion in *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, "The Phenomena of the Human," 71–132.

First, concentration on the creaturely differences focus on capacities and potentialities. However, these attributes do not seem to identify unambiguously absolute differences but quantitative differences along a continuum. Certain animals do seem to have at least some limited capacity for reasoning, communicating, forming societies, and having a certain self-awareness. There is a growing conviction within the biological and behavioral sciences that these differences are a matter of development; creatures more highly evolved have more developed capacity than those less evolved. Some explain that human capacities operate at higher levels because, as the parts of human physiology have reached the highest levels of development, the whole that emerges is greater than the parts. Personhood is then construed as the result of higher levels of physiological development. Such an approach does not eliminate difference altogether, but it does eliminate a difference of kind while emphasizing continuity. Some claim to avoid a reductionism by following this route, but I do not believe that it can resist collapse. Why not?

Because, second, the most important question that arises is not whether human capacities are the result of a unique history of physiological development, although that is where much of the present debate is tending to go. The real question is whether these capacities, no matter how developed, can be regarded as that which makes persons truly persons, whether they constitute the *imago Dei*. For Anderson like Barth, the response is decidedly no. The biblical account clearly acknowledges a continuity between the animal and human creatures. They are both taken from the ground. Apparently there is no need to deny this connection. But more importantly the explication of the *imago Dei*, both in the biblical narrative of Genesis and more particularly in the New Testament, does not build upon either the connection or distinction from the animals. There the *imago* emphasizes difference, and that difference is constituted by the human creature's unique and personal relationship with God. The in-breathing of God into the nostrils of humanity is what makes this difference in Genesis. God shares something of his very life-giving Spirit with humanity. The primary problem with an intra-creaturely analysis for identifying the *imago* is that it requires no essential reference to relationship with God. The *imago* can exist by itself as the private possession of an individual. The result is an anthropocentrism which then collapses further into a developmentally understood

but general creatureliness. God in the end becomes irrelevant, especially in any personal and relational way.

### **Image of The Image**

Admittedly the Old Testament accounts are not exhaustive in this connection. But what we find in the New Testament is that Jesus Christ himself is identified as the true image of God and that we are being renewed according to that image. Looking back to Genesis, then, the Hebrew is best rendered as human beings being created “according to the image of God” not “as” or “to be” the image of God. That is, humanity is created according to the Son of God, the Image of the Father, who became incarnate. We were created to be Christ-like. This, then, is the positive reason that humanity cannot be reduced to its creaturely dimensions.

Can this notion be filled out anymore? Anderson, again advancing along the same pathway as Barth, says yes. We were created to be addressed by the Word of God and to respond to that Word.<sup>24</sup> Humanity stands in relation to the Word which determines its origin *and* destiny. Being created according to the image points to the purpose God established that there should be creaturely beings who would become the children of God by sharing in the Son of God’s own Sonship. We have been designed to live in a particular relationship of union and communion through the Son with the Father in the Spirit. The Godward aspect of the *imago Dei* is essential in this framework. It is also essentially personal and relational.

What then of human creaturely capacities? Certainly, whatever capacities we have and however developed, they are certainly caught up and participate in the realization of that purpose and destiny to become those Christ-like children of God who partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). We are not the children of God without these creaturely capacities but with them. But what constitutes our humanity is not a human possession or possibility at all. Rather, the purpose, act, and decision of God extended towards his human creatures graciously establishes their humanity. The *imago Dei* is a divinely given designation and gift from the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Humanity is what it is by virtue of this connection, this dynamic relationship.

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<sup>24</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, Chapter 3.

### **The *Telos* of Humanity**

This sets a Christian notion of persons and purpose apart from most Western habits of mind. For Aristotle the *telos* of things, its ultimate destiny or purpose, was intrinsic to that thing. Each distinct thing had its own *entelechy* (in-built *telos*) that would come to be realized or actualized in each particular thing. The great oak is in the acorn. Although not always apparent, the acorn contains within it the seeds of its own perfection. In the Christian frame, the perfection of the creature lies *outside* of and external to the creature. Humanity fulfills its designation to become only on the basis of the gift and act of God. Thus, human beings become what they could never become on their own, namely the eternal children of God through Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit. Indeed, we become sharers in the divine eternal life. This is made possible only by the act and decision of God to create and redeem people through the incarnate Son of God, our Lord and Savior. Such a destiny occurs through the history of a relationship of God with humanity in Jesus Christ. Our relation to God mediated to us in Jesus Christ is what makes us human.

So, we return again to our starting point — humanity is what it is and will be what it will be in and through relationship to God. We cannot grasp the *humanum* of humanity apart from this history of relationship no matter what creaturely capacities we may exhibit. How should we understand those capacities? They are best regarded as aspects of our creatureliness. They are the creaturely channels through which we may manifest our true humanity in our creaturely sphere.

Barth emphasized that the human subject, the who of humanity, could not be identified with human capacities. Barth regarded capacities and potentialities as merely “the symptoms” of humanity not its essence.<sup>25</sup> The human subject could not be reduced to those capacities but identifies the one who uses those potentialities — the agent. That creaturely capacities could be used for good or evil was decisive for Barth. With our tongues we may bless or curse God and fellow humans. The capacities are neutral in this connection. However, the biblical picture does not depict humanity apart from a divine purpose, standing neutrally before a disinterested God who waits to see just how they use their various capacities. God

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<sup>25</sup> See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 198.

did not wait to be addressed by a decisive word from humanity, but addressed them with a particular Word and destiny which willed the right and good use of those capacities for right relationship with God and neighbor. Creation according to the Image placed humanity under a certain blessing and obligation and destiny. And that *telos* distinguishes humanity from other creatures.

## **Human Being and Becoming**

Human being is the gift of participating in a history of relationship with God through Christ which results in its becoming far more than what it ever could become apart from that dynamic of a personal union and communion. It follows then that a merely physical or biological analysis of human beings could never begin to approach the essence of humanity which tells us how we ought to use our creaturely capacities. This limitation is especially binding if such a “scientific” investigation was committed from the start to a bottom-up explanation. Such approaches by definition must exclude reference to (even if not metaphysically deny) anything not empirically and (at least in principle) universally verifiable. The only purpose discoverable via this naturalistic route would be one that must inhere in the creature itself and be a potential possessed by all in general. Its *telos* could never refer to more than a self-delimited self-actualization. It could only mark out an autonomous, that is, self-given and self-established purpose.

Such a “discovery” from the position of a *theological* anthropology could only serve to point towards the fallenness of humanity, its being curved back in upon itself. We would have to regard any self-designated purpose its anti-*telos*, for it could only affirm what humanity had become post-fall: namely, a humanity considered autonomously, apart from God and its origin and destiny. Such a non-theological and anthropocentric project would lead at best to the discovery of a creature autonomously possessing and using its neutral capacities. Such descriptions certainly could be of a certain use to those committed to a theological

anthropology, but they could never supply the foundation for a theological anthropology.<sup>26</sup>

We could conjecture that the social sciences might fare better than the physical sciences in approaching the true nature of humanity. But again this proves not to be the case. To the degree that psychology, social psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology are not speculative (and therefore not a species of philosophy) these disciplines, too, can only illuminate the creaturely dimensions of human existence. The results of such investigations, Anderson points out, can only lead to a deterministic or a perfectionistic view of humanity.<sup>27</sup>

Let's briefly trace out that necessarily reductionistic line of argument. The social sciences have as their proper field of investigation the history of humanity from the moment which has just passed to as far back as we have information about the human creature in its self-understanding and action as individuals or as groups, societies, aggregates. Within that history they take into account the living dynamics of relationship and a broad range of human capacities not pertinent to the physical sciences. Nevertheless, such disciplines do severely restrict our grasp of the origin and destiny, the purpose and place of humanity. Like the physical sciences, this is especially so if from the beginning reference to the domain of divine agency and intentionality is excluded from serious consideration. No advantage is gained even if certain human practices, such as religion in general and Christianity in particular that make such references to the metaphysical, are studied. Although some kind of *telos* might be discerned within human relationships, nevertheless, it would only stand for a corporate form of anthropocentrism. Humanity begins and ends alone with itself apart from God, unable to become anything more than what its own ambivalent capacities allow.

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Ray Anderson's work demonstrates this very asymmetrical integration of theology and other disciplines. A marvelous model of such integration with sociology is the book Anderson co-authored with Dennis Guernsey, *On Being Family* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). For a testimony to the fruitfulness of a truly theological anthropology for other disciplines and for ministry, see the essays in *Incarnational Ministry: The Presence of Christ in Church, Society, and Family*, ed. Christian D. Kettler and Todd H. Speidell (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1990).

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, *On Being Human*, 35.

### **Anthropology and Eschatology**

When we utilize the social sciences as if they were autonomous disciplines, they necessarily suffer another severe restriction, namely the exclusion of the future from its domain of investigation. The social sciences certainly can project out of the past into the future, but the past will always have a determinative say in the possibilities contemplated of the future. The only viable “prophetic” voice heard in this sphere is the bell-shaped curve.<sup>28</sup> The social sciences can provide no eschatology, especially one that reaches beyond the extinction of creaturely potentials at the death of individuals, societies, or, indeed, the death of all humanity. Explorations limited to the creaturely sphere at best offer an extension of the past projected into the future.

Now what is clear in Anderson’s view is that a theological anthropology is *essentially* conditioned eschatologically.<sup>29</sup> Humanity is essentially what it will be according to the possibility created by Jesus Christ who gives humanity a future that it could never give itself. We cannot grasp true humanity by looking back to its past, to its fallen past or even to its ultimate origin. Within a theological anthropology, the essence of humanity is revealed in the destiny secured for it by its Lord and Savior, the one who has come and will come again. We cannot ascertain the nature of humanity apart from the truth and reality of this hope of an eternal union and communion with the triune God. This hope breaks apart the determinism inherent in every scientific investigation which necessarily is restricted to the creaturely past.

While we cannot subject this hope to evaluation according to accepted natural scientific/empirical criteria, it is nevertheless based on an object located within the creaturely sphere. That object is the subject Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. For there in time and space we came in contact with the proclamation, determination and vision of the future of humanity. How is this so? A clarifying point must be made here. So often, even in Christian theological circles, we mistakenly

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<sup>28</sup> Jacques Ellul is especially illuminating in this connection. See his *Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

<sup>29</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, chapter 11, especially 175–80.

identify Jesus' creatureliness with his humanity.<sup>30</sup> We mistakenly begin with our own pre-understanding of our humanity and then compare Jesus to ourselves to see if he, too, is human just like we are. This is a colossal error. We do not see the essence of Jesus when we see how he, like us, has an earthly body, eats, sleeps, wears clothing, enjoys bread and wine and gets dirty, tired, hungry, and angry like we do. These things do indicate Jesus' assumption of our creatureliness. While this assumption certainly ought not to be denied or neglected, it cannot be regarded as the deepest truth about his humanity or ours. James B. Torrance often asked his students where and when we truly see the humanity of Jesus. Is it at the wedding at Cana? Asleep in the boat? Turning over tables in the temple? Struggling with temptation in the wilderness or in the Garden? No. We see our essential humanity held out for us in promise in the ascension of Jesus Christ. True humanity is exalted humanity, our humanity raised up to be with our Lord in the very presence of the Father.<sup>31</sup> While we will still very much be creatures, we will not be left in our fallen state, and apparently much of what we assume is intrinsic to our limited existence will fall away. We will have immortal and incorruptible bodies which will apparently allow us to interact with time and space in new ways. We will see that it is not and never was human to sin but rather that a Christ-like holiness is natural, not alien, to humanity. We will find that humanity can, by grace, very well exist in the holy presence of God. Humanity and divinity were destined to be together — in Jesus Christ. Indeed humanity, as true exalted humanity, can share in the divine eternal life when it is mediated to us through the God-man Jesus Christ in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. A theological anthropology is essentially eschatological for in Christ we see what we will become; namely, like him through union with him in his resurrection and ascension. True transfigured humanity has only appeared on the earth once, but there we saw the promise of our destiny revealed to us.

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<sup>30</sup> Apparently, the Apostle Paul at one time made a similar error. He says in 2 Cor. 5:16 "even though we once regarded Christ from a [merely] human point of view, we regard him thus no longer."

<sup>31</sup> See James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996).



The social sciences autonomously can never proffer such a hopeful vision of humanity.<sup>32</sup> Solely on the basis of their own resources they can only offer us a deterministic future eternally tied to the past or alternatively condemn us to a perfectionism which, despite that past, denies the past. On their own they can only set forth the sheer possibility of an imaginary future which might possibly be realized — if only humanity strives continually and heroically to set itself free from its past, indeed, from itself. Humanity, then, is condemned to perfect itself by itself to become something (super-creaturely? quasi-divine?) *other* than itself. A theological anthropology can never allow itself to be reduced to such deterministic or idealistic slavery. To do so would be to give up the good news of the true hope of humanity promised and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. By grace we may indeed compare our humanity to the ascended and exalted humanity of Jesus Christ, which will include our redeemed creatureliness.

### **Election and Humanization**

A christological and therefore incarnational and trinitarian theological anthropology will certainly be founded upon several other distinctives if it is to be true to the humanity in right relationship with God revealed in Jesus Christ. The eschatological nature of humanity makes it clear that human being is essentially a becoming, a becoming whose trajectory was established in Jesus Christ. We now must add that such becoming involves a personalization of human agency.<sup>33</sup>

John Macmurray has argued that Enlightenment rationalism, materialism, and Deism not only made the agency of God irrelevant but also destroyed in the process the significance of human agency.<sup>34</sup> Such an impending loss was sensed by the Christian, Kierkegaard, and the atheistic existentialists who, even if not consistently, followed him in this discernment. Ironically, in the attempt to secure

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<sup>32</sup> The point being, of course, that any human science need not and should not function alone any more than we can fully grasp the function of a machine, much less a person, except in connection with its purpose.

<sup>33</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, chapter 5.

<sup>34</sup> John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953). The Gifford Lectures, vol. 1, 1953–54. Reprinted by Humanities Press International, New Jersey and London, 1991.

autonomy from divine purpose, humanity lost the vitality of its own agency. For the very reductionistic methods of scientific explanation spawned by the philosophical commitments of the Enlightenment (either in its more rationalistic or positivistic mode or in its romanticist expressions) which seemed to grant humanity its autonomy actually enslaved him in a mechanistic and solipsistic world. In that world, despite the inevitability of death itself, there were those “existentialists” who proclaimed that human beings must somehow grant themselves their own fleeting significance. The need for divine activity within the universe had been eliminated. Divine purpose was relocated immanently within the structures of the universe discoverable by empirical investigation and transmuted into mechanistic natural laws. Consequently, modern and postmodern thought both attempted to be entirely satisfied with explanations, even explanations of humanity, which made no reference to an ultimate purpose given and sustained by God or enacted by persons. Human purposeful agency disappeared along with divine agency.

Persons were thereby not only cut off from God, but also cut off in any positive sense from each other (Sartre: “Others are hell”!). It should be apparent that a social, political, or for that matter even a personal, ethic is impossible within that framework. Despite Kant’s heroic attempt to put forth an ethic of duty which would allow for human autonomy, such a project has collapsed under its own weight. Ironically all that remains of his pragmatic ethic in our so-called postmodern mind is a purely externally applied heteronomous legal power over individuals constructed and arbitrarily enforced by others, most often by the most powerful cultural elites. We in the West often have bemoaned the publicized inhumanity of Mao, Ho Chi Min, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, and more recently Xi Jinping, and rightly so. But given the trajectory of the West in its reaction to throw off Jesus Christ, is it any wonder that the result has been the moral anarchy evidenced in Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Ceausescu, Milosevic, not to mention the seemingly perpetual spawning of eugenics in the US, Canada and the UK and western Europe? And more recently, should we not be concerned, for example, about the technocracy and

transhumanist movements and the sex-trafficking and organ-trade “businesses” of our day? These are the “wonders” of a post-Christian and secularized world.<sup>35</sup>

### **The True Self and Freedom**

A theological anthropology should never surrender the human self as being determined and set free under the purposes of God for union and communion with God through reconciliation to God in Jesus Christ. Human selfhood can never be identified with a creaturely autonomy that has no essential relation to God as God and to others as created and regenerated according to the image of Jesus Christ. Selfhood is constituted by Jesus Christ through the gift of a truly human agency which freely chooses to conform itself to its purposeful election to belong to the people of God. As the purposely chosen people of God, such persons live in the hope of their becoming who God intends them to be in and through their union and communion with God. We are all created to *become* who we are destined to be in Jesus Christ by participating in the covenant reality made actual and real by Jesus Christ. The election of God in Jesus Christ by the Spirit can never be regarded as an alien and externally applied legal obligation or status, but rather a becoming in hope which calls forth a faithful, joyful, and free participation in that determination, that actuality, that reality of the future together as the adopted-by-grace children of God. The freedom and sovereign purpose of God does not threaten or eliminate the free and thus personal agency of humanity but rather secures and assures it.

Indeed, this freedom is unidirectional; it runs only from death to life, from abandonment to belonging, from darkness to light, from injustice to righteousness, from hell to heaven. Furthermore, there is no other alternative, for human autonomy is a lie and depersonalizing and dehumanizing evil has no future. Our triune God has determined it to be so. The only future for humanity is the future held out for us in Jesus Christ. He humanizes humanity by bringing it (and all its creaturely capacities) into perfect harmony with the divine purpose and design to be holy as God is holy. Holiness is not a threat to humanity; it is only a threat to inhumanity. Personal relationship with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit is no threat

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<sup>35</sup> Indeed, we could include here all of what Pope John Paul II consigned under his designation the “culture of death” in his 1995 encyclical, “*Evangelium Vitae*” (“The Gospel of Life”).

to human freedom and selfhood, but rather is its only hope for becoming truly human by being essentially shaped by the communion designed and deployed in Jesus Christ, the true Adam. In him we see true personhood, and in him we, too, will become fully human persons. As for now we are merely on our way. But we see where we are being taken in the crucified, risen, ascended Jesus Christ of holy scripture.

### **Participation in Covenantal Freedom**

The relationship of divine and human agency has always posed a philosophical dilemma. But that mystery can never be adequately resolved through speculative reflection. Rather, we can see the perfect harmonization of divine and human purpose and will realized in time and space in Jesus Christ himself. That is where we can become convinced that neither divine nor human willing need cancel each other out or be delicately balanced against competing needs. Divine freedom and human freedom were perfectly actualized under creaturely conditions in Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and ascended. What term shall we use to speak of this interaction of human and divine agency?

In this connection we would do well to recover the biblical and theological notion of participation (Gk. *koinonia*). In this christologically-illuminated framework, the purpose, agency, and act of God establishes the arena of actuality and reality in which humans participate and thereby have a share in their own becoming by the grace of God. Our sovereign election in Jesus Christ makes room for our unidirectional acts of freedom. We are made free for one thing and one thing only, free to choose, affirm and embrace our election and therefore our destiny in Jesus Christ. This is the sense in which Ray Anderson wants to reorder our thinking so that it now moves from actuality to possibility.<sup>36</sup> Because humanity has been put on a whole new foundation of reconciliation with God, that actuality provides the possibility of life in union and communion with God.

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<sup>36</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, the chapters in Part 3, which carries this very title. This thought very much follows that of Thomas F. and James B. Torrance. See Thomas F. Torrance's two volume work, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* and *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*.

To deny this truth and reality, that Jesus is the Lord of humanity, is to attempt to live in unreality. Undoubtedly such misuse of our divinely given freedom will have consequences for the quality of our interaction with the God of our humanity. However, one of those consequences will not be the undoing of what God has done in our place and on our behalf. Such denial has no power to establish an alternative and counter reality in which we may live where Jesus is not Lord and Savior, the new Adam. A theological anthropology can never concede a cosmic dualism. Eternal death is not an equal and opposite form of eternal life. The grace of God upholds human agency that we might make use of our agency to affirm and participate in the truth and reality of our election to become the children of God in Jesus Christ. Union with Christ means participation in the life he gives us. As God acts on our behalf we are granted human "room" for us to participate. True freedom leads in one direction, to share in (participate in) the freedom of Christ-likeness. The claim that human freedom requires the arbitrary selection of moral opposites ("free" to choose good or evil!) is a lie that comes straight from the serpent in the Garden. It must be banished from the Christian frame of mind.

### **Freedom in Fellowship**

Those who in the power of the Spirit of Christ affirm their election will, in and through participation in their becoming, live in relation with others on the basis of the same hope for others that they have for themselves. The actuality of our reconciliation to God in Christ has at the same time founded a reality to be horizontally extended among human creatures. On that plane we also essentially live in relations, relations of freedom for fellowship, to borrow Karl Barth's categories. Humanity exists, as Barth traces it out horizontally, in three spheres of relationship: as children of parents, as male and female, and as neighbors near and far.<sup>37</sup> In right relationship we will treat persons according to God's humanizing purposes for them. Barth provides a wonderful fourfold identification of the humanizing qualities of such relationships: seeing eye to eye, mutually speaking and hearing one another, serving one another, and doing all this gladly and in

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<sup>37</sup> See these sections under the heading, "Freedom for Fellowship," in *Church Dogmatics*, III/4.

freedom.<sup>38</sup> We are called to be human by responding in these ways to the humanity of those others whom we will necessarily encounter in these relationships essential to human existence.

Of course, these very relationships of parents and children, men and women, and among the various ethnic/cultural/"racial" groups (neighbors) are those we find so troubling. The good news is that the dividing wall of hostility within these very relationships has in Christ Jesus already been broken down among God's human creatures so that there is one new humanity in him (Ephesians 2:15).<sup>39</sup> In the framework of a theological anthropology, reconciliation among persons is founded upon the reconciling work of God. The actuality of God creates the possibility among humans. If we were to investigate humanity autonomously, solely with the tools of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, political science and philosophy, would we conclude that all humanity has in actuality, in principle, been reconciled? No. But when Jesus Christ put all humanity on a whole new foundation of relationship with God, all inter-human relations were also put on a whole new foundation. That gracious work provides the basis for a transformed sociology and social ethic.

We were created to be in covenant love relationship with God and in turn with humanity by the same Spirit of love that from all eternity unites the Father and Son. Human existence is essentially a being-in-relationship with God and with others. The essence of our being-in-relation along these two axes is fully revealed in Jesus Christ: conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of woman. It is revealed in his perfect love for God and perfect love for humanity resulting in his perfect self-giving which reconciled humanity to God and gave them a share in his perfected

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<sup>38</sup> See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 249 and following.

<sup>39</sup> The verb tenses used and also the declaration that the new humanity exists "in Christ" (not "by means" of Christ nor as a potential goal) all indicate a completed actuality accomplished by Christ, to be lived out by those united to him as members of the body of Christ.

and ascended humanity.<sup>40</sup> On that basis, we can also then see more deeply into the creaturely structure of our being. We have our being by being children of parents. For without ancestors and parents we would not be. We have our being by being male and female united and differentiated in a polar human nature. We have our being by being neighbors to those near us and like us and to those distant and less culturally, socially, economically like us. To be united to Christ is to have brothers and sisters of every ethnos, tongue, and tribe. It's a Pentecost reality! To belong to Christ is to belong to the Body of Christ. We are members of that great congregation.

### **The All-Inclusive Humanity of Jesus Christ**

Here we must stop to point out that election for participation in covenant love does not mean (even though some might argue that it may logically imply) rejection. But rather, it means just the opposite. The election of God in the new Adam has universal intention. Those who personally and presently recognize their election participate in it by extending an invitation into election to include others. In the words of J. B. Torrance, Jesus' humanity is an all-inclusive humanity. Christians announce the news that exclusively in Jesus Christ can all others be included. He alone is the new Adam. He is the One for the many. That is the inclusively exclusive claim of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup>

### **Seeing Humanity in the Dark**

In fact, human agency, human freedom, human becoming in Christ have everything to do with becoming more and more a channel of God's own gracious election and covenantal love towards all, even one's enemies. Jesus Christ redeems our humanity and leads us more and more to recognize, hope in, and act towards others on the basis of their true humanity held out for them in him. I come to see

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<sup>40</sup> For an explication of Karl Barth's theological understanding of these intertwining relationships, see Gary W. Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological and Human* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), republished in two volumes by Wipf & Stock, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> See *Worship, Community*, 40–42; and James B. Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ," in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, A.D. 381*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1981) 137, 140.

that Jesus is their Brother as well as mine. To be fully human is to see in the most distorted situation the humanity of the other and to participate with God in having their humanity restored. That is, we are to love our “opposites” with God’s own love, whether they be parents or children (born or unborn), members of the other sex<sup>42</sup>, or foreigners. For the well-being of our **own** humanity depends upon it.

Of course, there is no other starting place along this pathway than Jesus himself. We only begin to be humanized when we see his humanity in right relation to God under the distorting conditions of fallen human existence even further contorted under the weight of the judgment of the cross. The first place where we begin to fulfill the double command to love God and man, where indeed we may perfectly love both simultaneously, is when we love Jesus Christ crucified, resurrected and ascended — and love him for who he is, true God and true humanity unconfusedly united in covenant love for us and our salvation.

## **The Test of True Humanity**

To be human is to recognize the humanity of the other, especially when it is hidden within a broken creaturely existence. The debates over abortion and euthanasia often assume that it is only the status of others that is in question. Is the fetus yet human? Is someone with Alzheimer’s disease still human? But the real question is not whether they are human, but whether we are! Our own being and becoming human will be manifest only as we recognize their humanity and love them in a way that affirms and upholds their humanity, that is, pursues God’s intentions for them to share in Christ’s own union and communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Humanity alive to God desires to see others included in the blessing of the living God who brings life out of death no matter how distorted or undeveloped a condition in which we find them. This recognition of true humanity is intrinsic to Christian faith. The Christian is one who has been given the gift of discerning the true humanity of God in the womb of the unmarried teenager Mary as well as in the

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<sup>42</sup> Anderson devotes an entire chapter to the matter of human sexuality. He contends that in the theological perspective human sexuality does not refer to “gender roles.” Rather sexuality is a modality of personal being that is polar. It is orientation toward a goal. It manifests a complementarity of personal being and serves as a basis for love and marriage. See chapter eight of *On Being Human*.



suffering and death of the fruit of her womb on the cross. Those who have thus begun the journey with Jesus towards humanization will also be those willing to bear the burden of hope for the as yet unborn and extending comfort to those for whom the potentialities of life are all but extinguished.

Two clarifying matters may be helpful here. In the frame of a theological anthropology the aim of love for others cannot be reduced either to the mere maximization of the actualization of creaturely capacities or to the mere avoidance of pain and maximization of pleasure. Humanity is surely expressed through the medium of creaturely potentiality and powers. But one's humanity itself is a gift which can be upheld by God even under the most severely constricted and distorted conditions where that humanity hardly, if at all, shines through. Essentially, then, love sees far beyond the barriers which prevent the realization of human potential to affirm in hope God's own love and electing purposes. Of course, wherever possible, the people of God welcome and promote the joyful expression of our true humanity and will not hinder or prevent such expression. Such manifestation of the glory of humanity created according to image of Jesus Christ bears witness to the goodness of God's humanity. But neither will it forget the gift of humanity in the purposes and intentions of God when that humanity is hidden or distorted. Our own humanization is at stake when we do or do not love with Christ's love the unborn, the neighbor, or the enemy. Jesus teaches us to recognize humanity, first in him, and then to participate with him in the humanization of others in worshipful surrender to him, the One True Human being.

### **Humanity and Suffering**

We must also say that suffering in and of itself is not destructive of humanity, even though it hides its manifestation and puts it under tremendous burden and constraint. Suffering also may indeed be a channel for exploitation by temptation of the Evil One. But a theological anthropology can never concede that suffering itself can separate us from the love of God. This in no way condones our making anyone suffer. Love alleviates suffering to the extent it can but only in ways that continually acknowledge the abiding humanity of the sufferer who belongs to the triune God alone. It is indeed possible to inhumanely relieve or avoid suffering. Withholding the truth, over-medicating, providing inadequate palliative care, indulging, or making

the person feel they are a burden can all be dehumanizing. Withholding medical care solely on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis and actively promoting the premature death of someone will often if not always be dehumanizing. The medical experimentation with persons who bear the image of their Creator and Redeemer, most particularly without their fully informed consent and even when purported to be for the greater potential greater good of others, is especially pernicious, indeed, evil. There are limits as to how we may alleviate suffering, for there are things worse than suffering or even death — namely the repudiation of our own humanity or that of others. The rejection of the humanity of the others will have a dehumanizing effect on us. If unchecked by repentance such disregard will inevitably lead to the repudiation of the true humanity (in perfect relation with divinity) of Jesus Christ. In fact, the insistence and self-justifying denial of the humanity of others may indeed be manifestations of rebellion against the grace of God set forth in Jesus Christ. We are warned in the New Testament that refusal to receive God's own forgiveness by humble repentance will lead to the second and eternal death that lie beyond our earthly demise.<sup>43</sup>

This is why, it seems to me, that Mother Theresa always sent the novices of her order to minister to the dying who had no hope of recovery in this life. To recognize the true humanity of persons in this condition calls first for the recognition of the humanity of the Crucified One. Those who love Jesus Christ crucified are those who are learning to love others who seem less than human. They can do so because of their hope for a transformed humanity founded upon the One raised and ascended for us on behalf of all.

### **Humanity Under the Gracious Judgment and Exaltation of God**

The final distinctive of a theological anthropology is that it will always remember that humanity lives by the grace of God. That is, humanity exists within an essentially fallen condition yet with hope for redemption only because God's future has already broken into that desperate situation. This in-breaking signals a consummation yet to come.<sup>44</sup> In Jesus Christ crucified we not only see our humanity

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<sup>43</sup> These are warnings, not predictions. But I am recalling passages such as these: Mk. 3:29; Matt. 18:22-35; 25:31-46; Heb. 3:10-13 and 4:5-7; Rev. 20:14-15.

<sup>44</sup> See Anderson, *On Being Human*, chapter 7.

in union and communion with God but also fallen and under judgment. What might seem a normal state for humanity is revealed to be abnormal, broken and twisted to its very root. In the cross of Christ, the depth of our need, guilt and shame is exposed — not in order to condemn us but to rescue us from ourselves.

In the cross of Jesus, we see that humanity does not just need to be freed from its creaturely limits of finite strength and knowledge or merely be given correct or higher ideals. We see that humanity cannot rescue itself by some incremental self-advancement from death and the evil that promotes it. In the death of Jesus, death seems to have the last word. But deeper than that, the manner of death at the hands of evil men reveals that all humanity is enslaved to malevolent corrupting powers greater than itself. His death exposes an evil conspiratorial power (Satan and his angels) which seemed to overcome good — the morally and spiritually perfect humanity of Jesus Christ. Apart from the gracious deliverance of God through death his humanity and so ours has no hope and no future. In Christ we see that humanity is so threatened and polluted by evil that it must be done away with, suffer a terrible judgment or sorting out, and then be re-made from the inside out. That is the only way for it to reach its God-given destiny. A theological anthropology, then, will resist reduction of the hope of humanity to a moralism or idealism of human self-improvement just as much as it rejects the hopelessness of a fatalism and determinism of human abandonment by God or autonomy from God, the Author of Life.

No autonomously human investigation can discover humanity under grace, although it may identify among other complicating and confounding factors or symptoms of this truth. Grace alone revealed in the bodily crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus shows us the true nature of our need and of God's adequacy. Humanity, to be free of its subservience to evil corruption that inevitably leads to death, needs to be judged, condemned to death, and then made alive again. But how can this be? It is possible because in Jesus Christ our fallen, rebellious, and broken humanity was actually judged. Dying in him now changes the very nature and meaning of death because in him we are also raised again to new life as renewed creatures set free from the power of evil and its devastating consequences of sinning and being sinned against — from corrupting and corrupted

humanity. On the cross of Christ we see the true condition of humanity in its alienation from God. But only in the resurrection and ascension of Christ do we see the radical transformation of humanity so that it may reach its destiny as the living people of God. In the end a theological anthropology can be nothing less than a theology of grace. As Karl Barth has said, we are prohibited [by the gospel] to take sin more seriously than grace, or even as seriously as grace.<sup>45</sup>

On that final note we bring to a close our reflections on a truly theological anthropology. Hopefully these few comments will serve as a helpful reminder of certain distinctives which must be preserved at this moment in the life of the church as it faces enormous reductionistic pressures which threaten not only the loss of God and God's grace in Jesus Christ, but also the loss of our humanity, our ability to recognize the truly human in ourselves, in our neighbors, and in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>45</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/ 2, 41.

# THE IMPORT OF THOMAS F. TORRANCE'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY FOR ADDRESSING RACIALIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** *Theological anthropology is "implicated" or intimated in various places in Thomas F. Torrance's corpus. However, the doctrine of humanity has not received sufficient consideration in secondary literature. This essay will devote consideration to the import of Torrance's theological anthropology for discussions of race in our contemporary context. Torrance did not write at great length on race and racism. However, he did critique anti-Semitism and Apartheid. Moreover, his theological anthropology can serve as a significant resource for the development of theological discourse surrounding race and racism in the present setting. Torrance's volume The Mediation of Christ will serve as the fountainhead for discussion given its treatment of dualistic Enlightenment thought, Israel and Gentiles, mention of anti-Semitism, the import of Jesus as the personalizing person/humanizing human as Mediator, and his vicarious humanity. How might Torrance's theological anthropology's implications for race confront racialization in the contemporary context? Consideration will focus on the need to address and advance beyond three*

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*problematic and interrelated constructs with their import for race: first, dualism; second, Hellenism; and third, nationalism, nativism, and ethnocentrism.*

## **Implicated: Theological Anthropology and Race**

According to James Cone, dogmatic theology has not devoted sufficient attention to the subject of race.<sup>1</sup> In fact, dogmatic theology's lack of consideration of race can reinforce racialization, which entails racism's impact in all spheres of society, from employment to housing, from health care to education, and from policing to incarceration.<sup>2</sup> All too often, members of the dominant sub-culture view racial concerns as secondary or minimal in importance. They may claim that racism has already been addressed satisfactorily. The idea in the United States that racism and racialization have been overturned and that we live in a post-racialized society fails to account for the fact that racialization does not proceed by way of constants but variables.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the problem continues to evolve in unique and disturbing ways long beyond slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights eras.<sup>4</sup> When dogmatic theology fails to engage racialization, it is implicated or incriminated in fostering the problem.

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<sup>1</sup> "Theologians and White Supremacy: An Interview with James H. Cone," in *America: The Jesuit Review*, November 20, 2006, <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2006/11/20/theologians-and-white-supremacy-interview-james-h-cone>.

<sup>2</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, with a new foreword by Cornel West (New York: The New Press, 2012); Danyelle Solomon, Connor Maxwell, and Abril Castro, "Systemic Inequality: Displacement, Exclusion, and Segregation: How America's Housing System Undermines Wealth Building in Communities of Color," Center for American Progress, August 7, 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2019/08/07/472617/systemic-inequality-displacement-exclusion-segregation/>; Sandra Feder, "Stanford Professor's Study Finds Gentrification Disproportionately Affects Minorities," *Stanford Report*, <https://news.stanford.edu/2020/12/01/gentrification-disproportionately-affects-minorities/>.

It's not always what we say and write about race that signifies whether we are racist. It's often what we fail to say and write that conveys whether we are racist. We must be alert and committed to confronting and overturning white privilege power systems. Torrance did not write at great length on race and racism. However, he did critique anti-Semitism and Apartheid.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Torrance's theological anthropology, which is "implicated" or intimated in various places in his corpus, as *Participatio's* editors argue, bears import for discussions of race in our contemporary context. His theological anthropology can serve as a significant resource for the development of theological discourse surrounding race and racism in the present setting.<sup>6</sup>

Torrance's volume *The Mediation of Christ* will serve as the fountainhead for discussion given its treatment of dualistic Enlightenment thought, Israel and Gentiles, mention of anti-Semitism, the import of Jesus as the personalizing person/humanizing human as Mediator, and his vicarious humanity. How might Torrance's theological anthropology's implications for race confront racialization in the contemporary context? In what follows, consideration will focus on the need to address and advance beyond three problematic and interrelated constructs with their import for race: first, dualism; second, Hellenism; and third, nationalism, nativism, and ethnocentrism.

## Beyond Dualism

Theologians must be ever mindful of the perennial, dualistic tendency of abstracting sensible phenomena in history from the God who reveals himself there. Theology rightly done will give pride of place to where and how God is revealed. God reveals himself to Israel. Torrance writes in *The Mediation of Christ*:

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<sup>5</sup> For the former, refer to the relevant discussion in Thomas. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992). For the latter, refer to the treatment of his trip to South Africa in the article by Justin W. Taylor and Graham A. Duncan, "The Life and Work of the Anti-Apartheid Movement within the Church of Scotland from 1975 to 1985," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018): 1–11; <http://www.hts.org.za>.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Jacquelyn Price-Linnartz, "Christ the Mediator and the Idol of Whiteness: Christological Anthropology in T. F. Torrance, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Willie Jennings" (PhD Diss., Divinity School of Duke University, 2016), 83.

In his desire to reveal himself and make himself knowable to mankind, he selected one small race out of the whole mass of humanity, and subjected it to intensive interaction and dialogue with himself in a such a way that he might mould and shape this people in the service of his self-revelation.<sup>7</sup>

Theology must guard against abstracting God's revelation from Israel as God's elect covenant partner. Moreover, it must be careful not to detach the spiritual significance of Israel from its spatial-temporal particularity. We cannot come to terms with God's revelation's "incisive definiteness and specificity" when operating "with a dualist frame of thought at the back of our minds." Why is that? According to Torrance, "it makes us want to detach the religious concept of Israel from the particularity of its physical extent and history in space and time, and to peel away from divine revelation what we tend to regard as its transient physical clothing." Torrance goes so far as to argue that this move "would be a fatal mistake."<sup>8</sup>

As is true of Israel, so it is true of all humanity. Humans are spatial and temporal beings. Moreover, as will be argued, we must see God's operations in history in and through Israel bearing on our humanity. We must not detach our humanity from this covenantal matrix in which Israel plays a "vicarious role" in mediating the redemption of humanity.<sup>9</sup> For Torrance, God's covenantal framing of Israel bears on human existence in its entirety.

Torrance's critique of damaging dualisms manifests itself throughout *The Mediation of Christ*.<sup>10</sup> It is a central tenet in Torrance's theology. Dualistic thinking affects our realization of our union with God in Christ. Torrance was ever mindful of the need to contend against dualisms that did great damage, including those forms of dualistic or "dichotomous" thinking that "detach Jesus Christ from God," "Jesus Christ from Israel," and "Christianity from Christ himself."<sup>11</sup> This dichotomous

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<sup>7</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 15–16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 34–36.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 47, 99–100, 107, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1.



perspective concerns a trajectory found in classical and European thought that “abstracted” sensible appearances from their “intelligible base.”<sup>12</sup>

In contending against dualistic thinking, Torrance highlights the importance of interrelations and internal relations. He indicates that we find both relational emphases in theology and science. Interrelations between entities are constitutive of their identities. Internal relations within entities constitute and distinguish them from other things.<sup>13</sup> Such relational dynamics are in play for all humans in our spatial-temporal existence. We find both interrelations and internal relations in Jesus’s identity. He is only who he is in such interrelations as “Son of David,” “Son of Mary,” and in his “bond” with God’s covenant partner Israel throughout time. Moreover, he is only who he is in such internal relations with God as disclosed in his “word and deed” to which the Gospel bears witness in the Church.<sup>14</sup> For Torrance, we cannot understand humanity apart from Israel’s history, apart from reconciliation with Israel, apart from the God-human who personalizes and humanizes us as human persons, apart from Jesus’ vicarious humanity, apart from the union of the immanent and economic Trinity. There is no dualism involving Israel and Gentiles, God and us, Christ and us, or the triune God in eternity and in history and their bearing on us.

Todd Speidell addresses the subject of dualism in an article on the reception of Torrance’s paradigm among theologians and scientists:

Torrance believed that modern theology remained trapped within dualist habits of thought that have plagued the mind of the Church since ancient times, damaging and disrupting its apprehension of the reality of our union with Christ. Dualism, both ancient and modern, resulted in an unfortunate conception of the universe as a closed, mechanistic continuum of cause and effect in which we cannot know

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 2–3. Here Torrance stands in stark contrast to Kant who argued that we cannot know things in themselves or their internal relations, only as they appear to us and in their external relations. See page 122.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3.

things in themselves, but only as they appear to us.<sup>15</sup>

Further to Speidell's claim, one of the striking features in *The Mediation of Christ* is how Torrance nimbly weaves treatments of scientists like James Clerk Maxwell and Albert Einstein into his theological arguments. He finds that their discoveries bound up with relational, holistic, non-abstractive and non-projectionist patterns of inquiry resonate far better with the biblical witness to revelation and trinitarian theology's subject matter than the Newtonian universe that for so long dominated modern theology.<sup>16</sup>

By no means irrelevant to the present discussion, all too often abstractive and projectionist patterns of inquiry, whether scientific or theological, prove devastating for treatments of race. Examples include Social Darwinian trajectories and Nazism's impositions on scientific inquiry and attack of Einstein as propagating "Jewish science."<sup>17</sup> Rather than project the visible onto the invisible, which we find in racialized treatments of God and nature, we must move from the invisible reality to the visibly real, as in the case of the Hebrew Scriptures with its command not to make graven images of God. As with the biblical command not to "project our creaturely images into God," we must respond to the divine self-mediation of

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<sup>15</sup> Todd Speidell, "What Scientists Get and Theologians Don't About Thomas F. Torrance," *First Things* (June 26, 2013): <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/06/what-scientists-get-and-theologians-dont-about-thomas-f-torrance>.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 2–3, 49. Note also his affirmation of Jewish scientists on page 21. For Torrance, one's theological deliberations on God's relation to the world bears upon scientific explorations. For a striking account of Newton's non-trinitarian theology's import for his physical theory, see Simon Oliver's article "Motion According to Aquinas and Newton," *Modern Theology* 17 (2001): 163–199.

<sup>17</sup> Consider the treatment of Nobel-prize winning scientists who were advocates of "Aryan physics" and who criticized Einstein for espousing "Jewish science" in Philip Ball, "How 2 Pro-Nazi Nobelists Attacked Einstein's 'Jewish Science,'" *Scientific American*, February 13, 2015, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-2-pro-nazi-nobelists-attacked-einstein-s-jewish-science-excerpt1/>. The article is an excerpt from Ball's book, *Serving the Reich: The Struggle for the Soul of Physics under Hitler* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014). See Agustín Fuentes' recent critique of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*. He sees it as "often problematic, prejudiced, and injurious. Darwin thought he was relying on data, objectivity, and scientific thinking in describing human evolutionary outcomes. But for much of the book, he was not. *Descent*, like so many of the scientific tomes of Darwin's day, offers a racist and sexist view of humanity." Agustín Fuentes, "The Descent of Man, 150 Years On," *Science* 372, no. 6544 (May 2021): 769.

revelation whereby we appropriate the images to refer to “the invisible God imagelessly.”<sup>18</sup> This orientation finds a parallel in the realm of science: “interpret what is visible from what is inherently invisible.”<sup>19</sup> It is little wonder, as Torrance claims, that “it is very frequently Jewish scientists who have led the way.”<sup>20</sup>

Dualistic forms of thought bear negative import for theological and scientific inquiry and their application to race. As it pertains to theology proper, such projections and abstractions cloud our vision so that we find it difficult to discern God’s revelation in history. As a result, we fail to account for God’s actual dealings with people and societies. It leads to discounting Israel as the locus of God’s revelatory dealings with humanity. Hellenistic ways of thinking “have steadily gentilised our image of Jesus.”<sup>21</sup> If we are blind to what is sometimes called the “scandal of particularity,” we will never be able to see how God could or would engage us today in particular and concrete terms in present day struggles, including racialization, as in the case of color-blindness.

Shortly, we will turn to consider Hellenistic or “gentilised” forms of thought in greater detail. Before doing so, it is important to highlight how dualistic thinking also manifests itself in detached or abstract consideration of one’s subject matter. We can only truly know the object under investigation if there is what Torrance calls “cognitive union.”<sup>22</sup> “All genuine knowledge involves a cognitive union of the mind with its object, and calls for the removal of any estrangement or alienation that may obstruct or distort it. This is a principle that applies to all spheres of knowledge, and not simply to our knowledge of God.”<sup>23</sup> Knowledge always involves union and reconciliation.<sup>24</sup> Thus, God had to reconcile and transform Israel. Revelation and reconciliation always go hand in hand. As Torrance writes in the

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<sup>18</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 24–25.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 24–25.

context of what he takes to be a rapprochement involving Jews and Christians, reconciliation is “the inner dynamic of God’s self-revelation, for there is no way of really knowing God without being reconciled to him.” God’s personal encounter with us is all-encompassing.<sup>25</sup>

As it relates to race, all too often, people who are not deeply invested and entrenched in the struggle claim to have advanced to an elevated status on race. They either see themselves as enlightened or have the appearance of being discerning without participating in the struggle or despise those as “woke” who are sensitive to racial problems. It is saddening to see a word that once conveyed the need to stay alert or vigilant on racial matters be made a term of derision.<sup>26</sup>

One cannot understand race without seeing oneself as existing in reconciled solidarity with others. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. Just as Israel underwent a fiery ordeal of purgation in relation to God, so we must undergo a baptism by fire in terms of race. Rather than presume neutrality and spectator status, we need to see ourselves as implicated and in need of purgation. Those of us who belong to the dominant culture must die to dominant culture power structures. As Torrance writes, Jesus’ cruciform love must lead the way forward as his “Cross has the effect of emptying the power-structures that the world loves so much, of their vaunted force.”<sup>27</sup> Jesus engages us and effects change, not by way of “external transaction” but full incorporation and appropriation of our fallen existence to transform us from the inside out.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>26</sup> Refer to the following two articles on these dynamics. The first is an article critiquing the Left as being “woke.” The second is an article critiquing the disparaging use of “woke.” Helen Raleigh, “Woke Racism Is a Systemic Problem in America,” *Newsweek* (May 6, 2021): <https://www.newsweek.com/woke-racism-systemic-problem-america-opinion-1589071>; Dana Brownlee, “Exhibit A Bill Maher: Why White People Should Stop Using the Term ‘Woke’... Immediately,” *Forbes* April 19, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danabrownlee/2021/04/19/why-white-people-should-stop-using-the-term-wokeimmediately/?sh=3b6344287779>.

<sup>27</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 39–40.

Jesus moves us beyond our in-groups and out-groups. We are embedded in our bodies, including skin color, as well as sub-cultures. But we are not reduced to them as persons in covenantal communion. We exist in relationship to others.<sup>29</sup> The relationships which exist between people are "onto-relations." This is so because "they are person-constituting relations."<sup>30</sup> Our personhood is embedded and emergent, arising from the biological and cultural, but not enslaved to the biological and cultural. The triune God constitutes us as persons with inherent dignity through the personalizing person of Jesus of Nazareth. This interpersonal constitution awards us with indescribable dignity and worth. We no longer look at anyone from a merely human point of view but from the vantage point of Jesus' vicarious humanity. We used to look at Jesus in a reductionistic way, but not any longer (2 Corinthians 5:16). We are the church, the covenantal community made up of Jews and Gentiles as the new humanity reconciled to God in Jesus through the Spirit. Contrary to the way many Christians, especially Evangelicals, today apparently view "personal covenantal relationships" as "passive inter-personalism," "a covenantal approach to relationships calls for a commitment to the well-being of others and taking action to secure it in every area of life."<sup>31</sup>

This covenantal framework is bound up with the "ontological reconciliation" that occurs through the mediation of Christ. In view of Jesus as "the personalising Person and the humanising man" who mediates us to God, the church as God's covenant community

is not merely a society of individuals gathered together on moral grounds and externally connected with one another through common ethical ideals, for there is no way through external organization to effect the personalising or humanising of people in society or therefore

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<sup>29</sup> For treatments of personalism and their import for human dignity in society at large, see the following works: Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Christian Smith, *What Is a Person?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Torrance, *The Mediator of Christ*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> Gary W. Deddo, "Neighbors in Racial Reconciliation: The Contribution of a Trinitarian Theological Anthropology," *Cultural Encounters: A Journal for the Theology of Culture* 3, no. 2 (2007): 36.

of transforming human social relations.<sup>32</sup>

The ontological reconciliation through the mediation of Jesus heals and transforms our various “inter-personal” relationships.<sup>33</sup> Will we live into that reality?

The idea that one can be racially astute without being interpersonally connected in total solidarity with those of other ethnicities in concrete historical and racialized settings is a sham and a denial of the ontological reconciliation that the triune God establishes. There is no way one can grapple with racialization’s entrenchment and complexities without substantial exposure and investment in diverse relationships. With this point in mind, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith note how difficult it is for white Evangelicals to address racialization due to isolation: “white Evangelicalism likely does more to perpetuate the racialized society than to reduce it.”<sup>34</sup> The very dynamics that help it thrive, such as its sustained investment in cultivating homogeneous solidarity, are what hinder it from seeing how pronounced racialization is.<sup>35</sup> God engages Israel and calls on us who are Gentiles to be in solidarity with Israel through the “permanent structures” that God put in place by way of teaching and liturgy, such as messiah, covenant, and atonement, which shaped the early church’s own thought and practice. We must engage one another,<sup>36</sup> Jew and Gentile alike, in view of the Hebraic patterns of old and Jesus as the sole mediator between God and humanity by way of embedded, personal covenantal communion, not detachment.

With this point in mind, it is worth drawing attention to Torrance’s rebuke of white Evangelicals in South Africa after he visited the country. They remained entrenched in Apartheid systems of thought and practice. Jacquelynn Price-Linnartz comments in her doctoral dissertation “Christ the Mediator and the Idol of Whiteness: Christological Anthropology in T. F. Torrance, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Willie Jennings”:

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<sup>32</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 71.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>34</sup> Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 170.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 125–127, 132–133.

<sup>36</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 17–19.

Torrance is “ashamed of many so-called ‘evangelicals’ in [South Africa] who live and act in such a way as to condone apartheid, keeping their Christian witness apart from any resolve to actualise in the flesh and blood of human existence reconciliation in Christ with one another.” Too many missionaries in South Africa, he judges, had detached Christianity from Christ, removed Christ from the center, rejected Christ’s “sole mediatorship,” and imposed “European Church divisions upon African people.” He issues a call to action, that the churches should “combat and eliminate obstructions to the Gospel of reconciliation through divisive policies enacted in the name of a Christian State and with the backing of a Christian Church.” If the churches did not unite ecumenically to overcome the divisions of apartheid, then they were living a lie.<sup>37</sup>

God has constituted and situated his covenant community in the matrix of cultural and social dynamics bound up with Israel. We should shape our communal life involving Jews and Gentiles and people of diverse ethnic backgrounds in view of these permanent structures embedded in the biblical narrative. The Jewish people continue to have a “vicarious mission” or “vicarious role” in the mediation of God’s work of redemption among the nations, including its being blind for our sake.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Jesus remains a Jew in his vicarious humanity, which will forever remain in indissoluble union with his deity as the God-Man.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, we must guard against Hellenizing the Gospel. We now turn to this subject.

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<sup>37</sup> Price-Linnartz, “Christ the Mediator and the Idol of Whiteness,” 83, quoting Thomas F. Torrance, “Strategy for Mission,” in The Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection (Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, [1976]), 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 34–36.

<sup>39</sup> Elsewhere Torrance highlights the continuity of Jesus’ Jewish identity for all time: “Thus 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. And to this very day Jesus remains a Jew while still the eternal Son of God. It is still through the story of Israel, through the Jewish soul shaped by the hand of God, through the Jewish Scriptures of the Old Testament and the Jewish Scriptures of the New Testament church, that the gospel comes to us, and that Jesus Christ is set before us face to face as Lord and saviour,” Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 43.

## Beyond Hellenism

We must guard against Hellenism on the one hand and nationalism on the other hand. Proper consideration of Israel that guards against Hellenism or “gentilised” forms of thought involves consideration of the spatial-temporal configuration of divine self-revelation.<sup>40</sup> God always works with his distinctive people Israel. Contrary to dualistic ideological patterns, Israel is a distinctive people and nation in space and time with all that entails, not simply a religious or moral concept:

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.<sup>41</sup>

Hellenistic thinking entails promoting spirit over matter, spirituality over physicality, rather than seeing them as inseparable, as in Jesus’ incarnation. Kanzo Uchimura refers to this spiritualizing dynamic in his critique of Western imperialist missions as “amorphous” spirituality.<sup>42</sup> While it does not appear that T. F. Torrance accounts explicitly for the Hellenistic impulse’s role in anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish thought and action in *The Mediation of Christ*, it was certainly apparent in Aryan Supremacy and Nazism’s reign of terror against the Jews.

Alan Torrance reasons that German nationalism’s rise fostered spiritual subjectivism and the relativism concerning the “imperatives of the Gospel.”<sup>43</sup> Such

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<sup>40</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>42</sup> Kanzo Uchimura, “Japanese Christianity,” in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 2, ed. Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); reprint, H. Byron Earhart, ed. *Religion in the Japanese Experience: Sources and Interpretations*, The Religious Life of Man Series, ed. Frederick J. Streng (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1974), 113 (italics added).

<sup>43</sup> Alan J. Torrance, introduction to *Christ, Justice and Peace: Toward a Theology of the State in Dialogue with the Barmen Declaration*, by Eberhard Jüngel, trans. D. Bruce Hamill and Alan J. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), xi.



relativism and spiritual subjectivism of the law of the gospel advanced the *Volksnomoi* or law of the German people.<sup>44</sup> According to Karl Barth, only by privatizing Christ's law could the fallen powers equate "the law of God" and "the law of the German people." Such seeds of privatization had already been sown given the influence of Neo-Kantian thought in certain sectors of German culture, according to which religion was relegated to the realm of the "*Individuum*."<sup>45</sup> Barth's *Barmen Declaration* contends against the *Volksnomoi* and the Third Reich in view of Jesus Christ, the one Word of God. For the gospel is Jesus Christ, and him alone. He "is the one Word of God." In the light of him, the church rejects "other events, powers, historic figures ..., and truths ... as God's revelation."<sup>46</sup>

To return to spatial-temporal considerations, it is important to note the importance of land in Torrance's mind. People of the book and people of the land go hand in hand. They are inseparable. Torrance observes an awakening among Jewish people in his day to champion *Am ha' Aretz*, which involves the wedding of the Torah and the Promised Land.<sup>47</sup> There can be no "abstract intellectualism and legalistic moralism" when Judaism (and the Church, for that matter in accounting

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<sup>44</sup> With the rise of nationalism in Germany, which Barth refers to as "these recent troubled times," one finds the invention of the "Volksnomoi." Karl Barth, "Gospel and Law," in *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*, with an introduction by Will Herberg (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968), 91.

<sup>45</sup> See Alan Torrance, introduction to *Christ, Justice and Peace*, xi.

<sup>46</sup> Douglas S. Bax, trans., "The Barmen Theological Declaration, A New Translation," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 47 (1984): 79. Bax points out that the "'German Christians' spoke of Hitler as the German Moses" (79, fn.9). He also highlights Ernst Wolf's exegesis of this text. According to Wolf, "events" refer to Hitler's seizure of office in 1933, "powers" as "*Blut und Boden*," "figures" as Hitler, and "truths" as the doctrines of the "Volk" (Bax, "Barmen Theological Declaration," 79, fn.10). See Ernst Wolf, *Barmen. Kirche zwischen Versuchung und Gnade* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1957), 104. It is worth noting that Barmen has been hailed as a paradigmatic text in the struggle against oppression. For discussions of the relevance of Barmen for the war against oppression, see the following two works: John W. DeGruchy, "Barmen: Symbol of Contemporary Liberation?," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 47 (1984): 59-71; Desmond Tutu, "Barmen and Apartheid," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 47 (1984): 73-77.

<sup>47</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 16.

for Israel) accounts for the full implications of its spatial-temporal<sup>48</sup> reality as God's covenant partner throughout history.

Torrance is right to emphasize land in his consideration of God's covenantal purposes for Israel. Willie Jennings has astutely appropriated concern over spatial considerations involving Israel and Jesus for Christian discipleship in the contemporary context:

Rather than the emergence of spaces of communion that announce the healing of the nations through the story of Israel bound up in Jesus, spaces situated anywhere and everywhere the disciples of Jesus live together, we are now the inheritors and perpetrators of a global process of spatial commodification and social fragmentation. These processes are performed within the class and economic calculations of global real estate. They force local communities to reflect global networks of exchange in regard to private property that echo colonialism's racial hierarchies and divisions.<sup>49</sup>

Such problematic dynamics manifest themselves in gentrification and results in decay for minority communities in their places of origin. Economic and educational challenges abound. Gang activity increases. It is critically important to challenge dualistic forms of presumed gospel witness that prize spirit over matter and in which church planting initiatives by the dominant culture in these urban environments fuel further displacement of minority communities.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>49</sup> Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 293. See also page 292. J. Kameron Carter also emphasizes the Jewishness of Jesus. According to Carter, the Enlightenment project Hellenizes him, taking away his Jewish particularity bound up with Israel as an elect community (rather than a race). This bears on colonialist and imperialist trajectories abroad: the West (with its Hellenized Christ principle) is always better than the rest. J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> For an important new work on what can be done to address the global real estate problem in America's inner cities, see David E. Kresta, *Jesus on Main Street: Good News through Community Economic Development*, with a foreword by Paul Louis Metzger (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021).

Torrance's affirmation of Israel as a spatial-temporal reality in God's covenantal purposes holds great promise for addressing social unrest, as noted here. One cannot readily divest people of their landed identity in Christian mission if one accounts for Israel's embodiment in the land as part of Gospel witness. Still, there is one problematic feature, and it bears on nationalism, which we will soon address. Given Torrance's concern to guard against nationalism, including in the context of Israel,<sup>51</sup> it is important to qualify concern for the land of Israel with concern for the Palestinian people who lived in the land for generations before the formation of the modern state of Israel.

The Old Testament calls on Israel to care for the alien in their midst, treating them as natives and providing them with an inheritance (Ezek. 47:21-22). How much more should that be the case when those in the land are not aliens or sojourners, that is, recent arrivals, but people who have lived there for generations, even as neighbors? One cannot treat them as Canaanites, who existed in the land at the time of the Conquest. Palestinians and Jews had lived together in peace for a very long time. Like the Jews, they are also people of the Book, as they are Muslims and Christians.

Speaking of people of the Book, Christian Zionism often neglects consideration of Palestinian Christians, who have been departing in droves from the region for decades. Christian nationalism and concern for eschatology apart from ecclesiology shapes the psyche of many American Christian nationalists and Zionists. They have no seeming awareness or vital concern for Palestinian Christians and no appreciation that these Palestinian Christians have been a stabilizing and mediating presence in the region. Their absence only intensifies the divide and fans extreme positions among Jewish and Muslim people, as well as the Christian West and Muslim world.<sup>52</sup>

It is also worth noting here that the modern state of Israel does not reflect the Old Testament Scriptures' call to shalom in the land. Yes, Israel has every right to experience safety and prosperity and should not be subject to aggression. That

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<sup>51</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> See for example Don Belt, "The Forgotten Faithful: Arab Christians," *National Geographic* (June 2009): 85–86, 94.

said, it has no right to confiscate and demolish Palestinian property and homes, build and expand settlements in direct violation of international law, and build walls and checkpoints that keep Palestinians from getting to work and having access to healthcare.<sup>53</sup>

Torrance cannot be expected to address this issue in *The Mediation of Christ* in any detail or forecast the resulting and ongoing aftermath of the Six Days' War of 1967 for Jewish-Arab relations. Still, it was striking that no mention was made of the matter in his treatment of the modern state of Israel<sup>54</sup> and given his concern over nationalism. That said, Torrance is to be commended for resisting the move to discount Israel's vicarious role in God's redemptive purposes in history. As he writes elsewhere,

rebellion against the reconciling purpose of God being worked out through Israel cannot but bring fragmentation among the peoples and nations of [hu]mankind, for it detaches them from their creative centre in God's providential activity in history, when they are thrown back upon their separated existences and cultures as national entities. Nationalism of this kind can only take the form of group-egoism or ethnic sin, which is the poisonous root of all racism.<sup>55</sup>

We now turn to address the subject of nationalism, nativism, and ethnocentrism.

## **Beyond Nationalism, Nativism, and Ethnocentrism**

We have highlighted the need to contend against Hellenistic impulses that downplay spatial-temporal, ethnic, and cultural particularity, including Jesus' Jewishness. It is also important to guard against the other extreme of promoting matter over spirit

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<sup>53</sup> For consideration of illegal settlements and movement restrictions, refer here: "'High time for accountability', UN expert says as Israel approves highest rate of illegal settlements," *UN News* October 30, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/10/1076572>; "Permits, checkpoints and the Wall: Health care barriers due to movement restrictions," World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, <http://www.emro.who.int/pse/palestine-infocus/seam-zone-access-health-services.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 44–45.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Divine Vocation and Destiny of Israel in World History," in *The Witness of the Jews to God*, ed. David W. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1982), 87.

or reducing spirit to matter, which involves nationalism, nativism, and ethnocentrism. Torrance protects against the latter extreme by distinguishing between nation and people and by giving primacy of place to Jesus as the *telos* of God's gracious covenantal purposes with Israel.

Regarding nation and people, Torrance argues that Israel is both a nation (*ethnos*) and a people (*laos*): "Unlike any other nation Israel is not just a nation, an *ethnos*, but a people of God, a *laos* ...."<sup>56</sup> Israel is ultimately God's covenant partner and so must guard against giving way to a completely nationalistic orientation. Not only in the ancient world, but also in the modern era, Israel has an extremely challenging role to play in God's purposes:

... as *laos* as well as *ethnos* Israel cannot behave as though it were only *ethnos*, a nation like the other nations of the earth, without conflicting with the basic relationships which underlies its whole history and existence. That is to say, Israel cannot completely nationalise its own existence without detaching itself from the very covenant with God which constitutes it the people that it always has been and is.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to the important distinction between nation and people and how Israel functions as both a nation and God's covenant community, we must also consider Israel's subordinate status to Jesus Christ when confronting nationalism. Jesus Christ, not Israel, serves as "the controlling centre of the mediation of divine revelation in and through Israel." He is this controlling centre given his identity as "the personal self-revelation of God to man, the eternal Word of God made flesh once and for all." Jesus "constitutes the reality and substance of God's self-revelation, but Jesus Christ in Israel and not apart from Israel."<sup>58</sup>

If Israel could have comprehended this non-nationalistic, Jewish messianic hope in Jesus' day, it would have been spared much grief. Rather than fixate on the temple and nation, it would have viewed Jesus as the temple and as their long-expected Messiah, whose kingdom aims did not put the Jewish people in harm's

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<sup>56</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 14.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–23.

way with the Roman Empire. If Israel had viewed Jesus as the temple and long-anticipated Messiah, this frame of mind would have put a check as well on their nationalistic and ethnocentric ambitions. In John's Gospel, Jesus becomes the point of reference, not a building or city. Jesus' body is the ultimate temple. Jesus makes this claim in the context of cleansing the temple and the authorities' demand for an authoritative basis for his actions (Jn. 2:18-22). Such de-centering and reframing political opposition was the only way forward for Israel, as N.T. Wright argues.<sup>59</sup> Jesus as the center rather than the temple or nation also would have prompted Israel to reconcile with the Gentiles rather than prohibit them from entering the inner court with the threat of loss of life. Paul certainly had this context in mind when he spoke of Christ Jesus breaking down the wall of division between Jews and Gentiles in the church (Ephesians 2:11-22).

How often do our nationalistic ambitions today exclude peoples of other lands, namely those we deem unclean or impure, as the equivalent of Gentile barbarians, especially those of darker complexion and those of different faith traditions like Islam? What happens when white Christian nationalists and nativists feel threatened by "the other" and sense the need for cleansing the world and their native land — not necessarily themselves, and by whatever means? What might the result or aftermath be?<sup>60</sup>

We must ensure that such disturbing ideologies as nationalism and nativism do not arise in our midst. Rather than view any nation or people group as God's natural selection, we must champion the notion that we only stand by God's grace. Israel is central, not by nature, but by grace. As a nation and people, Israel, and only Israel, has this role, not because it is superior or inferior in any way. It had no

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<sup>59</sup> See N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 54–73.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew L. Whitehead, Samuel L. Perry, and Joseph O. Baker, "Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election," *Sociology of Religion* 79 (2018): 147–171; Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Philip Gorski, "White Christian Nationalism: The Deep Story Behind the Capitol Insurrection," *Berkley Forum* (January 22, 2021): <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/white-christian-nationalism-the-deep-story-behind-the-capitol-insurrection>.

"special religious propensity or insight." It was not "morally or spiritually worse."<sup>61</sup> Rather, it serves in this role in view of God's electing purposes for revelation and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. Given that God calls Israel into this unique role, we should neither take its mantle for ourselves (nationalism and ethnocentrism) or blame Israel (anti-Semitism). If anything, we should be grateful for the role Israel plays on behalf of all nations and peoples, honor Israel, and empathize with Israel for the suffering it bears in this fundamentally unique role throughout history.<sup>62</sup>

God's covenantal grace made an indelible impression upon Israel's being and transformed it through a most painful process:

The Old Testament Scriptures, which are the product of it, show that Israel was subjected to the most appalling suffering, an ordeal in which Israel was again and again broken upon the wheel of divine Providence in order to become pliable and serviceable within the movement of God's intimate self-giving and self-communicating to it as a people set apart for that end.<sup>63</sup>

It endured "physical and mental" suffering at the hands of other nations on account of its peculiar status as God's covenantal people.<sup>64</sup> It suffered "internal upheaval

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<sup>61</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Torrance's view of Israel's centrality as a suffering covenantal community calls to mind the rabbinic leader "Rashi," that is, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040–1105) and his interpretation of Isaiah 53. The fundamental difference between the two is that Rashi generally does not interpret the Suffering Servant as an individual Messiah, limiting the Suffering Servant's role to Israel as a people. Moreover, he does not appear to emphasize Israel's disobedience, but righteousness. Rashi and others commented on Isaiah 53 against the backdrop of the persecution of the Jews at the hands of Christians during the Crusades. The theme of God's presence prompted Rashi's comments on Isaiah 53: Has God abandoned his people Israel? One solution was to interpret Isaiah 53 to refer to the nation. God was not abandoning Israel but giving them a unique role in suffering on behalf of the Gentiles. Joel Rembaum points to one place where Rashi interprets Isaiah 53 in messianic terms. See Joel Rembaum, "The Development of a Jewish Exegetical Tradition Regarding Isaiah 53," *Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1982): 289–311, including the note on the individual messianic figure — 294, fn.19.

<sup>63</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 8.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

whenever it chafed at its covenanted destiny.”<sup>65</sup> As far as its ultimate suffering at God’s hands is concerned, Torrance argues,

But Israel had to suffer above all from God, precisely as the chosen medium of his self-revelation to mankind, for divine revelation was a fire in the mind and soul and memory of Israel burning away all that was in conflict with God’s holiness, mercy and truth. By its very nature that revelation could not be faithfully appropriated and articulated apart from conflict with deeply ingrained habits of human thought and understanding and without the development of new patterns of thought and understanding and speech as worthy vehicles of its communication.<sup>66</sup>

We should not idolize or demonize Israel. Rather, we should empathize with and affirm Israel in its representative or vicarious function for humanity in covenant relation with God. Israel’s obedience prepares the way as it participates in God’s revelation in Jesus. Its disobedience also reveals or “mirrors” our own rebellion against God. Torrance argues:

the conflict between God and man throughout Israel’s existence which contributed to its strangeness, mirrors the conflict between God and ourselves, which we resent, and while our real quarrel is with the searching light of divine revelation reflected by Israel, it is against Israel itself that we vent our resentment. There we have, I believe, the root of anti-semitism.<sup>67</sup>

It is exceptionally challenging for other nations and people groups to understand and value Israel’s role in the world. We cannot compute the singular “depth and intensity of the contradiction between man and God” that Israel embodies in its representative function.<sup>68</sup> But rather than taking it out on Israel as anti-Semitism

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 11–12.



does, we should come to terms with the fundamental problem: our real conflict is not with Israel, but with God.

Just as anti-Semitism is excluded, supersessionism finds no place in God's covenantal plan. God's covenant is with the whole of Israel, not just a part. It's for all time, not just leading up to Christ. Israel as a people experiences security, not independent from, but in relation to Christ, the eternal mediator. Israel finds its security in him.<sup>69</sup>

In addressing the perennial problem of uprooting the Hebrew Scriptures (like Amos) from Israel, Torrance writes:

we detach patterns of thought from their embodiment in Israel as they [are] presented in the Old Testament Scriptures, or even in the New Testament, and then schematise them to our own culture, a western culture, a black culture, an oriental culture, as the case may be. It is not difficult, as Albert Schweitzer found, to show that, when we seek to interpret Jesus like that within the conditioning of our European culture, we inevitably lose him.<sup>70</sup>

We must remain vigilant to see "him as he really is, as a Jew."<sup>71</sup>

Given God's continued purposes for Israel, there can be no sense in which other groups, whether white Christian nationalists or nativists, who wear the mantle of manifest destiny,<sup>72</sup> or African Americans in the form of the Hebrew Israelite

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>72</sup> For a historical discussion of Christian nationalism, including Manifest Destiny, in the U.S. to the present time, see Mark T. Edwards, ed., *Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Basel: MDPI, 2017); download <https://www.mdpi.com/books/pdfdownload/book/326>.

movement,<sup>73</sup> may detach and uproot the Jewish people from the Hebrew Scriptures and view themselves as the true heirs of the biblical promise. All besides Israel are Gentiles. That said, there can be typological extension and application (not detachment or replacement) in drawing comfort and hope for deliverance from such passages as the Exodus story, as in the case of African American slaves and later generations of African Americans engaged in the struggle for justice in the church and society at large.<sup>74</sup>

The ultimate comfort and hope for deliverance we find in Genesis and Exodus is that God will bless all peoples through the promised One who will descend from Israel. He is the hope of the nations. He will reconcile all peoples to God and Israel with the nations. The biblical narrative portrays one humanity and one mediator of humanity, Jesus of Nazareth, for Israel and the rest of humankind in their differentiated existence. Given that there is one humanity and one mediator between God and humankind according to Scripture, it follows that the racial divisions that we find in society are not inherent. They are neither theologically or

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<sup>73</sup> It is important to pause and differentiate “Black Jews” who originate from Sub-Saharan Africa and African Americans who are sometimes called “Black Jews,” but who refer to themselves as “Hebrew Israelites.” Regarding the latter, they are “obviously liminal even in their status as Black Jews; they often reject any identification with the modern Jewish community or practice or at least are unwilling to undergo conversion, believing that would be a relinquishing and submission of their own — allegedly longstanding — traditions and claim of identity to one that has no stronger such claim; sometimes they perceive themselves or African Americans generally as the authentic descendants of the Israelites or Judaeans, while the people commonly known as Jews are seen as European interlopers who by some feat have become mistakenly regarded as linearly related to the people of the Bible. These Judaizing groups most generally do not name themselves Jews, but prefer to go by the name Hebrew Israelites, or one of a few other variations. There are several factions among this broad movement, of varying ideologies and varying degrees of militancy in their outlook.” Michael T. Miller, “Black Judaism(s) and the Hebrew Israelites,” *Religion Compass* 13 (2019): 1–10.

<sup>74</sup> See Albert J. Raboteau, “African-Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel,” in *African American Christianity: Essays in History*, ed., Paul E. Johnson, with a foreword by Vincent G. Harding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1–16; David F. Herr, “Identification with Biblical Israel and the Exodus Story,” *Encyclopedia.com*, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/identification-biblical-israel-and-exodus-story>. Richard Lischer discusses the African American community’s comparison of Dr. King and other African American preachers and leaders with Moses and the biblical prophets in *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 172–176.

biologically grounded, but psychological and sociological constructs. Paul addresses such psychological and sociological problems.

Ephesians 2:11-22 features the church as a community made up of Jews and Gentiles. That includes everyone through faith in Christ. Paul writes of how the triune God has removed the dividing wall of hostility involving certain applications of the Law that functioned to polarize the two groups. Through Christ, the two have been brought together as one new humanity (Ephesians 2:15), fellow citizens of his kingdom, members of his household (Ephesians 2:19), and temple parts/participants (Ephesians 2:21).

Torrance reflects upon this passage.<sup>75</sup> As he considers the Apostle Paul's argument, Torrance reasons that there is an "inner relation between the doctrine of atonement and the doctrine of the triune God."<sup>76</sup> Moreover, he asserts that one only has "access to knowledge of God as he is in himself" via "God's self-revelation through the medium of Israel" and "reconciliation with God through the cross of Christ."<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, in addition to Jesus, the Spirit of God "intervenes in vicarious intercession on our behalf and pours out the love of God into our hearts."<sup>78</sup> What we find here, as well as throughout the volume, is Torrance's unequivocal stance in contending against dualisms of various kinds. He takes issue with our "gentile approach" in East and West that discounts Israel's connection to Jesus<sup>79</sup> and that dualistic trajectory that discounts Jesus' fundamental reality as God and human. Regarding the latter, Torrance writes: the Nicene *homoousion* "overthrew the dualistic ways of thinking dominant in the Hellenistic culture of the ancient world and made room for the formulation of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See for example Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 103–105.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 109–110.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 122–123.

F. F. Bruce also addresses Paul's treatment of the Jew-Gentile division in Ephesians 2. In Paul's day, certain interpretations and applications of the Law served to ostracize Gentiles. It was not that the Law itself was done away with by Jesus, but the written code or letter of the law. Bruce writes that the transformation occurs through Jesus' high priestly sacrifice and the empowerment of the Spirit in our inner persons:

It is not the law as a revelation of the character and will of God that has been done away with in Christ .... The righteousness required by the law of God is realized more fully by the inward enabling of the Spirit — in Jew and Gentile alike — than was possible under the old covenant. But the law as a written code, threatening death instead of imparting life, is done away with in Christ.<sup>81</sup>

In the biblical context involving Jews and Gentiles, whether the wall of hostility was the barrier that divided the court of the Jews from the court of the Gentiles in the Temple or the Law as a written code, the fundamental problem according to Bruce was ultimately psychological — often a sense of superiority bound up with separateness. As we see in Romans 1-3 and 9-11, the sense of psychological superiority can work both ways. Bruce writes about this psychological barrier:

The barrier between Jews and Gentiles was largely a psychological barrier, the antipathy aroused by the separateness of the Jews, accompanied as it often was by a sense of superiority on their part. But this antipathy, it is affirmed, has been abolished by Christ "in his flesh" — that is, by his death... How? Because by his death he has done away with that which separated the Jews from the Gentile, "the law of commandments, ordinances and all."<sup>82</sup>

Such barriers or dividing walls of hostility exist in our day, too. We have laws that isolate and "otherize" individuals and people groups on account of ethnic differences. Such othering might not manifest itself in visible or explicit laws of

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<sup>81</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 298.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

religious legalism, slavery, segregation, and redlining. They could simply be laws or ideological constructs of social segregation that allow us to stay entrenched in our respective domains of confirmation bias, conservative and liberal forms of identity politics, and consumer comfort zones, which keep us from realizing our emancipation and full equality in Christ.

Often such laws of separation in the modern period involve a mistaken sense of racial superiority that claims to have scientific support. All too often, people view racial barriers as biological. This is fallacious thinking. Anthropologist Agustín Fuentes discusses this theme:

In humans today, there are not multiple biological groups called “races.” However, race is real and it impacts us all. What we call “race” are social categories ...

There is currently one biological race in our species: *Homo sapiens sapiens*. However, that does not mean that what we call “races” (our society’s way of dividing people up) don’t exist. Societies, like the U.S., construct racial classifications, not as units of biology, but as ways to lump together groups of people with varying historical, linguistic, ethnic, religious, or other backgrounds. These categories are not static; they change over time as societies grow, diversify, and alter their social, political and historical make-ups. For example, in the U.S., the Irish were not always “white,” and despite our government’s legal definition, most Hispanics/Latinos are not seen as white today (by themselves or by others) ...

The biologized racial fallacy “influences people to see racism and inequality not as the products of economic, social, and political histories but more as a natural state of affairs.”<sup>83</sup>

This naturalistic trajectory is extremely dangerous and damaging. When we think of racial constructs in biological terms, we may look at social inequities as

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<sup>83</sup> Agustín Fuentes, “Race Is Real, But Not in the Way Many People Think — Busting the myth of biological race,” *Psychology Today* April 9, 2012, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/busting-myths-about-human-nature/201204/race-is-real-not-in-the-way-many-people-think>.

inevitable forces of nature. While not biological, such social constructs can negatively impact us biologically, as Fuentes argues. Social configurations along racialized lines affect minorities in their access to good health care, biological development, and immune systems.<sup>84</sup>

As important as it is to point out that there is only one biological race in our species, it is even more important to highlight that there is only one mediator between God and humanity, namely Jesus Christ. While the racial problem is social and psychological, the solution to addressing it requires the triune God's transformation of our being in the history of Jesus' mediatory work as divine and human who together with the Spirit vicariously enacts the new humanity in which we are called to participate.

### **Concluding Implications: Beyond Moralism**

Consideration of Jesus as the divine-human mediator is critically important to overcoming racial barriers. Jesus as "a human doctor, a moralist, or a social worker" can deal with "external relations," but nothing more. However, as the God-Man, he is able to go much deeper and address human depravity at its fount: "if Jesus Christ is God the Creator himself become incarnate among us, he saves and heals by opening up the dark, twisted depths of our human being and cleansing, reconciling and re-creating us from within the very foundations of our existence."<sup>85</sup>

Jesus' atoning work is not simply based on the historical occurrence of Jesus' crucifixion in which he enacts an "external transaction" between God and humanity expressed in "moral or legal terms." Rather, the atoning work that reconciles God and humanity (and Israel and Gentiles) takes place "ultimately within the incarnate mystery of the union of divine and human nature in Jesus Christ the Mediator between God and man, and thus as ineffable inexplicable mystery hidden in God himself."<sup>86</sup> The triune God alone is able to transform our creaturely being so that we not only want what God wants for humanity, but also do what God wants through

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<sup>84</sup> Fuentes, "Race Is Real, But Not in the Way Many People Think."

<sup>85</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 62.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 114.

participation in Jesus' vicarious humanity. He takes to himself our fallen human nature to redeem it<sup>87</sup> in conjunction with the Spirit's vicarious activity.<sup>88</sup> We cannot make it by our own effort in whole or in part. We rely on God's grace at work in Jesus through the Spirit. Through participation in Jesus' life by the Spirit, we experience and express God's sacrificial love to people of diverse racial backgrounds freely and fully.<sup>89</sup>

The preceding discussion calls to mind Bob Dylan's song on racism titled "Blind Willie McTell." Dylan sings of God being in heaven and our longing for the good that God intends for us. And yet, we are caught up in a relentless struggle between such longing and our insatiable desire for "power" along with "greed" and humanity's "corruptible seed." Their intensity and propensity give the appearance of being "all that there is."<sup>90</sup> What is missing from Dylan's poignant song (which was written and recorded shortly after the close of his Christian period of music) is that the God who is in heaven makes his way to earth and brings about the new order of being in the Spirit through the mediation and vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ.

While it might not work as song lyrics, Jesus' vicarious humanity that responds to God's saving love<sup>91</sup> and our participation in his life through the Spirit is what makes it possible for us to exist in the actuality of one humanity of differentiated unity, namely, Jews and Gentiles. The onto-relational basis for our humanity established through the divine-human mediation and vicarious activity of Jesus Christ grounds the transformation and action. It is more than a biological unity since our biology cannot undue the depravity. The problem is more than social and psychological, even though racism is a social construct. The social and psychological distortions reflect a deeper disruption, which constantly surfaces in

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 109–110.

<sup>89</sup> For more on the subject of participation in God's triune grace, see Geordie W. Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace and Participation: An Entry into the Theology of T. F. Torrance*, Emerging Scholars (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

<sup>90</sup> Bob Dylan, 1983, "Blind Willie McTell," vol. 3/14, *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1–3 (Rare & Unreleased) 1961–1991*, Columbia Records, 1991.

<sup>91</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 77, 94.

every domain through the social and psychological barriers we create. We cannot simply think differently or act differently. We must undergo a transformation of our being, which is exactly what God enacts in our lives through Jesus' mediation and vicarious humanity. As Torrance argues,

sin has been so ingrained into our minds that we are unable to repent and have to repent even of the kind of repentance we bring to God. But Jesus Christ laid hold of us even there in our sinful repentance and turned everything round through his holy vicarious repentance, when he bore not just upon his body but upon his human mind and soul the righteous judgments of God and resurrected our human nature in the integrity of his body, mind and soul from the grave. Thus as the firstborn of every creature he became the firstborn from the dead, and the head of the Church of the firstborn.<sup>92</sup>

We need to remember who we were before Christ — and what Christ has since made us to be. May no sense of superiority or inferiority lead us to segregate from one another. We need to live into the reality of our new humanity in Christ and confront racial bigotry, indifference, and social segregation. Let us take time to remember where we come from, what God has done for us, and who we are as one new humanity in and through Jesus, the sole mediator between God and humanity as the Jewish Messiah. He is the humanizing human and personalizing person,<sup>93</sup> who is the ground of the new humanity who destroys impersonal racialized structures. In view of what God has actualized for us in Jesus tearing down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles through his cross and through the indwelling presence and empowering love of God's Spirit, may we not dehumanize or depersonalize diverse individuals or communities as "other," but live together as one.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 47–49, 67–72.



**THE *IMAGO DEI* AS A WORD OF GRACE IN THE THEOLOGICAL  
ANTHROPOLOGY OF THOMAS F. TORRANCE**

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**Abstract:** *This essay demonstrates how Torrance's theological anthropology receives its method and material substance from the doctrine of grace. We will consider in order the motion of grace and the imago Dei, human hostility to grace, and finally the Trinity's response to human hostility to grace. Undaunted by human weakness, the Word of grace continues to shine forth, calling and drawing human creatures to turn from themselves and mirror the way of Christ, thus reflecting by the Spirit the glory and joy of the beloved Son of the Father.*

In my earlier work I argue that the framework which gives shape to Thomas F. Torrance's theology is found in the particular way in which he understands grace.<sup>1</sup> Grace is not merely "divine favor" or "getting what we don't deserve." Grace has real content, grounded in the hypostatic union and the Trinity. From the fullness of his triune life and love, God gives himself to us in Christ and the Spirit that we would become sharers in the humanity of Jesus Christ, enjoying *koinonia* with the Father through the Spirit. In short, grace is the *self*-giving of God for our salvation.

Geordie W. Ziegler, "The *Imago Dei* as a Word of Grace in the Theological Anthropology of Thomas F. Torrance," *Participatio* 9, "Theological Anthropology" (2021): 157-172. CC-by-nc-sa. #2021-GWZ-1.

Based on a careful reading of Torrance's theology, I am convinced that this intensely personal understanding of grace as inclusion and participation in the triune life and love is the interpretive key which unlocks the logic of Torrance's entire dogmatic project.

In this essay, I demonstrate how Torrance's theological anthropology receives its method and material substance from his doctrine of grace. We will consider in order the motion of grace and the *imago Dei*, human hostility to grace, and finally the Trinity's response to human hostility to grace. Undaunted by human weakness, the Word of grace continues to shine forth, calling and drawing human creatures to turn from themselves and mirror the way of Christ, thus reflecting by the Spirit the glory and joy of the beloved Son of the Father.

### **The Motion of Grace and the *Imago Dei***

Torrance approaches his theological anthropology through what he calls (with Barth) the "analogy of grace" (*analogia gratiae*).<sup>2</sup> This analogy is grounded essentially in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ whose existence is an ontological and relational uniting of divinity and humanity in one person. *This*, Torrance writes referring to the Incarnation, is "the central relation and union of God and Man of which every other relation must partake."<sup>3</sup> As such, any doctrine which attempts to speak of the relation of God and humans must "be grounded entirely upon the hypostatic union as its true and only valid analogy."<sup>4</sup> Through the lens of this analogy, the relation between God and humans is understood as one of faith and grace, such that the proportions of this relation are determined by "the relation of Man and God in hypostatic union in Christ Jesus."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Torrance also refers to this analogy as the "Logic of Grace" and the "Logic of Christ." See T. F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 205-222, especially pages 214 and 216. Cf. Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace*, 42

<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Word of God and the Nature of Man," Originally published in *Reformation Old and New: Festschrift for Karl Barth*, ed. F. W. Camfield (London: Lutterworth, 1947), 121-141. Reprinted in *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965). All references will cite *Theology in Reconstruction*, 114.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## **The Downward Motion of Grace**

The analogy of grace, or more simply “grace,” is a dynamic relation which has a particular form and movement, both of which correspond to the hypostatic union. The hypostatic union, Torrance notes, is a *dynamic* union, a *movement*. While the Chalcedonian definition offers helpful boundaries, the image it offers is framed in static, negative terms. Torrance correctively asserts that the union is an active, uniting, personal union in which atoning union shapes the inner dynamics of the ontological reality of the hypostatic union. The form and content of grace begins here.

The form and content of grace begins with the fact that the direction of grace always moves irreversibly *downward* from Jesus Christ to humanity. “[I]t is upon this downward motion of God’s grace that the very being of man is grounded.”<sup>6</sup> Torrance means this quite literally. The “being” of human beings does not receive its ground in some inherent *analogia entis* between Creator and creature. The only ontological continuity which exists between humanity and God is that which exists within the dynamic movement of the *unio hypostatica* in which God and humanity are united in Jesus Christ. This dynamic ontological relation between divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ *is* the ground of our being as creatures created *in, through, by, and for* the triune God. Jesus Christ is the ontological ground of humanity’s relation to God. It is upon this foundation that Torrance understands the biblical metaphor of the *imago Dei*.

## **The *imago Dei* and the Communication of Grace**

Torrance finds the biblical metaphor of the *imago Dei* particularly attractive as it fits perfectly within the shape of his theology of grace.<sup>7</sup> As we respond to the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 99. Torrance refers to the dynamic movement embodied in the hypostatic union by a variety of terms: “the way of Grace;” “the Word of Grace;” “the motion of Grace,” etc.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ibid., 102.

*communication* of grace in faith, fellowship with God is effected and the image of God becomes engraved upon a person.<sup>8</sup>

As such, the *imago Dei* effectively functions for Torrance as another way of describing the dynamics of grace among human creatures.

Within the single thought of *imago dei* there is included a two-sided relation, but it is a relation which has only one essential motion and rhythm. There is the grace of God, and man's answer to that grace. Such an answer partakes of and subsists in the essential motion of grace – for even man's answer is the work of the Holy Spirit who through the Word forms the image anew in man, and forms his lips to acknowledge that he is a child of the Father. The *imago dei* is thus the conformity of an intelligent being to the will and Word of God.<sup>9</sup>

While the above quote is Torrance's attempt to summarize Calvin's thought on the *imago*, it is clear that he is incorporating Calvin's approach into his own framework. The image is constituted by two sides or factors which give it an objective and a subjective basis: the *dynamic movement of divine grace*,<sup>10</sup> and a correlative *dynamic movement of human response*.<sup>11</sup> The *objective* side of the *imago Dei* is God's beholding or regard of the human creature as his child, while the *subjective* side is the human response or answer to God's gracious decision to regard her as his child.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Torrance notes that the idea of the image of God being "engraved" upon a person is Calvin's term. It is certainly possible to misuse and construe "engraved" as a metaphysically static metaphor, and Torrance would certainly reject any interpretation that was not grounded and maintained relationally.

<sup>9</sup> Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> Associated terms which Torrance uses to indicate this divine movement include: Word, motion, direction, downward, and communication.

<sup>11</sup> Various terms which Torrance uses to indicate the human response include: mirror, answer, life-answer, re-live, reflexive (as in spontaneous), continuous reflection (as in mirroring), and participation.

<sup>12</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 105.

In Christ, the *imago Dei* is objectively and subjectively realized, for in the life of Christ, God images himself back to himself.<sup>13</sup> In Jesus Christ we behold the image of God fashioned by the grace of God. The Father lovingly beholds the Son, and the incarnate Son returns the gaze of love by perfectly facing the Father, in utter dependence, obedience, and filial trust. As the Father beholds his image in the Son, the Son's joyful answer perfectly mirrors the love of the Father. Constituted in and by this relation of love and trust, Jesus Christ is the objective basis which undergirds the subjective pole of grace.

The subjective pole is the answer of faith, which Torrance describes as an *intelligent* human response.<sup>14</sup> The subjective side of the relation "partakes of and subsists in" the objective side. Like a mirror, the response (the reflection of the image) is dependent upon a corresponding reception of the image. The image is imaged, but only as the mirror is actually facing the object being imaged.<sup>15</sup> When the life of a human being is "an intelligent motion in answer" to the movement of divine grace, a kind of "responsible union with God" occurs, a spiritual regeneration in which all forms of self-justification and self-grounding are abandoned for a spiritual life which is beyond ourselves. In this subjective pole, the believer consciously bears witness to the Word and grace of God. A motion of faith answers the motion of grace. This is the image of God enacted in us.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Motion Contrary to Grace — the Destruction of the *Imago Dei***

If this is so, if faith is the essential motion which corresponds to the motion of grace,<sup>17</sup> then lack of faith (distrust, the will-to-autonomy) is the motion

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>14</sup> Terms used by Torrance which are associated with this human response include: responsive, acknowledgement, thankfulness, consciousness of creaturely dependence, knowledge, devotion, obedience, witness, and faith.

<sup>15</sup> Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 100. Also, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 32.

<sup>17</sup> Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 82.

contradictory to grace. Sin is the inversion and repudiation of grace, the ultimate hypocrisy of the created being. Its essence is the claim that the *imago Dei* is something one can achieve by one's own efforts and thus possess. It is the irrational claim of ontological autonomy. This illusion of autonomy is "the very motion of sin."<sup>18</sup>

Torrance notes that we only know about sin because we have seen and heard the Word of grace which "carries with it a total judgment upon the natural man."<sup>19</sup> Humans were created such that they "not only owe their origin to *grace*, and depend on *grace* from moment to moment, but cannot have any true motion except in accordance with *grace*, and within these 'barriers'."<sup>20</sup> When in our presumption we transgress the bounds of grace, the whole relation between humans and God, the *imago Dei*, is perverted into its opposite.<sup>21</sup> The essence of this perversion is ingratitude and an insistence upon living from a center in ourselves.<sup>22</sup> This ungrateful "hostility to grace" is "a sinful motion of pride and self-will."<sup>23</sup> While functioning in this way, contrary to grace, humans are essentially blind to knowledge of God or of his love.

Since grace is dynamic and personal, its contradiction is also dynamic and personal (or personally impersonal as the case may be). Thus, sin is not most properly an ontological state of being, but the way in which we enact our being. Sin is not passive, as in a mere absence of proper reflecting or an innocent ignorance of the law. Sin is a "positive contradiction" which "maintains itself in an active opposition."<sup>24</sup> This impersonal and active opposition involves a perversion of the whole person. Thus, as Torrance points out, while Reformed theology views "sin as

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<sup>18</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 109.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>20</sup> Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 124–125.

<sup>21</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 107.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 113.

properly of the mind,” the concept of “the mind” refers to the whole person.<sup>25</sup> The mind is not a location (i.e., the brain), but the entire orientation of a human being: intelligence, emotion, will, and desire. As such, the mind has “a total relation to the person” such that when the natural gift of reason becomes corrupted, the whole human nature becomes degenerate and subject to the *irrational* activity of sin. Alienated in mind from God, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not understand it.<sup>26</sup>

### **Trinity’s Response to Human Hostility to Grace**

Human hostility to God’s motion of grace does not negate the Word of grace, neither does it eradicate the presence of the Holy Spirit, nor create an ontological separation between humans and God. The Spirit of God continues to maintain the creature; the Word of God continues to call the creature to trust. However, the Word of grace is now experienced as judgment. The loving faithfulness of God’s Word of grace judges our fearful and deluded hostility to grace. Yet grace’s judgment of sin *is itself* grace. Sin is held by grace even as it is confronted with grace. The Word of grace persists relentlessly, and it is the objectivity and activity of that Living Word that constitutes the *imago Dei*. This context carries several implications.

#### **The Creature is Held in Grace**

God refuses to let humans fall back into non-being but continues to hold onto his original intention for them. The *imago Dei* does not fade away for it has its objective source and ground in Christ’s imaging relation with the Father. The light of Christ beheld by the Father shines in each and every human being. This light of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 107, quoting Calvin’s commentary on Rom. 2:1. Torrance does not divide the human person up into neat and separated categories. Since the human person is a whole, the perversion of sin affects the whole person – including the mind. Because the mind has “a total relation to the person” (i.e., since humans are essentially rational beings), when the natural gift of reason is corrupted human nature as a whole becomes degenerate, 117.

<sup>26</sup> Torrance, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*, 119.

God's continual beholding is the human's life as a child of God, "the 'imago-light' which God intends to be in his soul."<sup>27</sup>

As life, light, and love, the Word of grace continues to speak over every human being. Since the *imago Dei* itself is fundamentally a product of God's beholding the work of his grace in us, it is not tarnished or dragged down by human rebellion; rather, "it continues to hang over man as a destiny which he can realize no longer, and as a judgment upon his actual state of perversity."<sup>28</sup> God's original intention for humanity, "the law of his being," is not dropped but is maintained in spite of the Fall.<sup>29</sup>

God's refusal to let us go creates the "impossible situation of the sinner in active perversity against the will of God, and yet [simultaneously] maintained in being by the mercy of God."<sup>30</sup>

God continues to speak his Word and thus human beings must continue to turn toward God in response, but when we turn toward God we recognize a conflict between God and our own self-will. We discover a gap between our "is" and our "ought." From this standpoint, post-Fall, the *imago Dei* can only be interpreted in eschatological terms.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the way of our being does not match the call of our being need not lead us to abandon all hope. On the contrary, it draws us deeper into grace, for grace *is* our life.

### **The Creature is Restored in Grace**

The eschatological nature of the *imago Dei* is a function of the fact that it is not and *never was* humankind's possession. The *imago Dei* is only "possessed" by Christ. Humans are merely "the image of the image," while Christ is "the unique image-

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>28</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 107.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 108.



constituting Image of God.”<sup>32</sup> He is the *Imago Dei* in essence, for he is the Word of God. Consequently, true humanity is not discovered by examining our origins in Adam, but our destiny in Christ in whom the image of God is fully realized. “[T]he original intention of God becomes an event in man’s existence only by the Word, and the *imago* is possessed only in faith and hope until we see Christ as he is and become like him.”<sup>33</sup>

It is at this point that the centrality of the hypostatic union, as the objectification of the Word of grace in our space-time, comes to the fore as the form and content of the subjective realization of the *imago Dei* in us. In the dynamic personal activity of his hypostatic and atoning union (that is, in the self-giving of God in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection event), he asserts himself over against our sin, and in his own person inverts our perverted order. Christ continually personalizes and humanizes the rest of humanity, inverting the perverted disorder in individual human lives correspondent to the hypostatic uniting which took place in his incarnate life. Through his self-insertion and assertion, he who is “the ground of our existence beyond our existence” also becomes “the ground of our existence within our existence.”<sup>34</sup> Through the Holy Spirit, his way becomes ours in him. In him, we are harmonized and personalized; apart from him, human nature “goes out of tune.”<sup>35</sup> The triune God is the fullness of personal being who personalizes human beings.<sup>36</sup> As Myk Habets points out, within Torrance’s theology, “the movement within the salvation of men and women is from human

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition,” *Modern Theology* 4 (1988): 317.

<sup>33</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 109.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “Immortality and Light,” *Religious Studies* 17 (1981): 152. Quoting Georges Florovsky.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1999), 18.

being, a biological fact, to human person, a moral, theological fact."<sup>37</sup> We are *persons-in-becoming*.<sup>38</sup>

We have already noted that for Torrance, the human response actually "partakes of and subsists in" the essential motion of grace. By faith, we participate in the new humanity of Christ.<sup>39</sup> As such, "grace must be understood in terms of [Christ's] human as well as his divine nature."<sup>40</sup> Just as it is the divinity of Christ which determines the personhood of the humanity of Christ, and just as the humanity of Christ only has its existence in the personhood of the divine Son, so too our humanity has no independent existence apart from the active, sustaining, presence of the divine Trinity.<sup>41</sup> Torrance will have nothing to do with second causes. There is no human act in which God is not also active.

In the context of faith and the human decision, Torrance explicitly and boldly articulates the analogy:

We must say then that there is a kind of hypostatic union between grace and faith, through the Holy Spirit, a kind of *communio quaedam consubstantialis*! Faith has no independent existence apart from the initiative of grace, nor is it in any sense the product of human activity working independently of the Word. It is WE who believe, and we come to believe in a personal encounter with the living Word. Faith entails a genuine human decision, but at its heart there is a divine decision, which, as it were, catches up and makes it what it is, begotten of the Holy Ghost.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 55.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 191.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>41</sup> Torrance utilizes the terms *anhypostasia* and *enhyposstasia* to express this reality.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "Predestination in Christ," *Evangelical Quarterly* 13 (1941): 130. Cf., "In, under, and with ... the human decision, there is a divine decision, apart from which the human decision has no existence at all; indeed would never have been called into being," *Theology in Reconstruction*, 131.

Encircled by the faith of Christ, our faith does not stand on its own. It subsists inside our union with the humanity of Christ. "Faith" is an intelligent echo, a conscious repetition, of the very movement of grace which was enacted in Christ, the true Image of God. Our faith in effect mirrors the faith of Christ, but the mirroring is, by definition, only by grace. That is, it takes place only as we welcome the activity of the Spirit through a dynamic relation of "total dependence."<sup>43</sup> Apart from the continual activity of the Spirit, the image of God in the world would be an ineffective and vain reflection. When kept close to God, the "empty image" becomes a "vital life."<sup>44</sup>

By way of conclusion, I would suggest two concrete ways we participate in grace. These are two motions of being by which we can cooperate with the work of God in our lives. Dying to self by turning toward Christ, and reflecting the Trinity's glory by enjoying the belovedness of our sonship with Christ. In the way of grace, just as death precedes resurrection, so also self-abandonment to Christ as Subject and Lord opens the way to knowing the freedom and joy of the life of Christ before the Father in the Spirit.

*Turning from self; Dying to live – filled with the self-emptying way of Christ*

We participate in the restorative work of grace in and upon us through a corresponding movement of grace through us, that is, by a continuous turning from ourselves toward Christ. The acknowledgment of grace drags us out of our self-assertion, self-imprisonment, and blindness, and re-inverts the hostile and irrational motions of our mind and will.<sup>45</sup> This answer of ours is an act of the Spirit beyond the level of our nature by which the Spirit mysteriously "forms the ear to hear and the mind to understand" ... "and our hearts to submit to its yoke."<sup>46</sup> Cooperation with the motion of grace involves a downward or humble movement in which we follow

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<sup>43</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 102.

<sup>44</sup> Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 65, in reference to Eph. 4:18.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>46</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.2.20-21; *Commentary on Luke* 24:45.

the way of Christ in his self-offering death. "It is only by this *mortification* that we are renewed *in the image of Christ* and the life of the Spirit."<sup>47</sup>

We do not image the image of God by holding onto control or by saving our lives. Independent from God, the image of God in human beings is hopelessly inverted. One does not repair a mirror by mending a broken one, but by completely changing it out for a new one. Participation in grace (i.e., in Christ) requires of us a trajectory that is the very opposite of self-assertion, self-will, and self-justification. Rather than continuing our default obsession with attention, appetite, and approval, our attention is on Christ, our appetite is for his will, and we have no anxiety about being enough. Torrance explains the "human side" of this movement in this way: "when we try to know God, we must yield ourselves and our knowing to God, so that it is He who takes control, and our part is to respond to His initiative, and His movement, correspondent to His Word."<sup>48</sup>

This "self-emptying of faith" in which we "stretch out an empty hand" combined with "the acknowledgment of thankfulness" carries us out beyond ourselves so that we depend entirely upon God's movement of grace.<sup>49</sup> As our mind and will are filled by their proper Object (i.e., Christ), Christ then can walk us into freedom. In this way, Jesus Christ is not only the Object of our faith and will, but also its *Subject*. As we allow Christ to be the lead-Subject of our day to day lives, the *imago Dei* is imprinted upon us and our humanity is recreated. "Not I, but Christ in me" becomes an experiential reality (e.g., Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 15:10). *How* this actually occurs cannot be scrutinized. Calvin writes, "I see that I am able; but *how* able I see not. This far only I see, that it is of God."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 145.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>49</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 115.

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.35.

*Beheld and beholding; Reflected glory — gratefully receiving the transforming belovedness of sonship*

God's beholding of the creature and God's determination to remain in relation to the creature create the foundation that enables the creature to turn by grace towards God.<sup>51</sup> God's beholding of the creature is a way of describing God's knowing and loving orientation towards and for the creature. The onto-relational nature of human personhood means that human transformation takes place in the receiving and returning of God's beholding. Ontology is not *given*; it is *caught* (personally communicated), or more properly *shared in*.<sup>52</sup> The loving gaze of the Father, Son, and Spirit upon the creature has a real and transforming effect upon human beings, effectively calling and drawing them into responsive being.

As the image is a reality brought into being by God's loving beholding of the creature, it is also an image that fundamentally is perceptible only by and through the eyes of God. God beholds, knows, and loves the image which he images. The metaphor here is intentionally and inextricably relational. Because of its intrinsic relationality and practical fruitfulness, Torrance praises the brilliance of Calvin's use of the mirror metaphor:

Only while the mirror actually reflects an object does it have the image of that object. There is no such thing in Calvin's thought as an *imago* disassociated from the act of reflecting. He does use such expressions as *engrave* and *sculptured*, but only in a metaphorical sense and never dissociated from the idea of the mirror.<sup>53</sup>

For Torrance, the mirror metaphor is far from passive. The *imago Dei* is verb more than noun. It calls for a continuous motion of reorientation and turning towards the proper object. The *imago* only reflects God when it faces God. "Freedom is only

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<sup>51</sup> "The image of God is basically that which God sees and fashions by His Grace." Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 43; cf., *Inst.* 3.17.6.

<sup>52</sup> For a parallel argument around the metaphor of light, see Torrance, "Immortality and Light," *Religious Studies* 17 (1981): 159.

<sup>53</sup> Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 36.

possible face to face with Jesus Christ.”<sup>54</sup> Fellowship and freedom in Christ cannot be “pocketed.” As such, grace does not heal reason.<sup>55</sup> “Obedience of the mind toward God” is the disciple’s ceaseless activity. God does not “fix” us so we can graduate and rise above our childlike need for grace. Just as the eye is continually dependent upon the light of the sun, so too do we need the continual grace of illumination. As human creatures take their stand in the Spirit and face the Father with the Son, they reflect God’s glory by bearing witness in their very beings to the filial purpose for which they were created. In this sense, the image “is essentially a supernatural gift grounded in grace and possessed only in faith.”<sup>56</sup>

Life, *eternal* life, the life that knows the Father with his Son (John 17:3), is a life oriented with the Son, through the Spirit, toward the light of the Father’s face. Such a life of dependence is supremely characterized by joy. This possibility sets humanity apart from the rest of creation.<sup>57</sup> Human beings have been graced with the unique ability to enjoy their relation with God “in a conscious and intelligent fashion.”<sup>58</sup> “Intelligent,” “conscious” “enjoyment” of our dependent relation on God arises from a posture of ceaseless listening and knowing how radically we are known and loved. We “give ear to the Word”; we know ourselves to be called into being by God; and we know that God has set his love upon us in order to assume us into the divine fellowship as children of the heavenly Father.

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<sup>54</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 123.

<sup>55</sup> Torrance, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*, 173.

<sup>56</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 105.

<sup>57</sup> Torrance approaches his discussion of the image by noting Calvin’s fondness for Paul’s statement in Acts 17:28 that as humans “we live and move and have our being in God.” Calvin identifies three gradations of human existence: “being” (which applies to all creation), “motion or animation” (which applies to all living creatures), and “life” (which is strictly associated with humans). Calvin suggests that this “higher life in God” which is uniquely proper to humans is “peculiarly matched to grace.” He goes on to describe this higher life (or spiritual life) in terms of *light*, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). This life which brings light is correlated with the Word of God, the communication of which brings understanding, and to which humans must respond. *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

Such hearing and knowing that we are known and loved is only retained and nurtured by gratitude: "by a continuous thankful acknowledgment of this gracious calling of God," where no independence of life is presumed in themselves, but all is received as "the pure gift of God."<sup>59</sup> This is the way we experience the truth of our life as children of the Father.<sup>60</sup> Our "true life" is, in essence, "grateful sonship."<sup>61</sup>

This re-creation does not take place in a single day, nor does it ever reach a terminus. No matter how mature or how long one has walked the path of faith, we remain dependent upon God's light. The "not I, but Christ in me" of St. Paul is a spiritual discipline.<sup>62</sup> We must "wear the glasses of the Word all the time ... continually transcending our judgments."<sup>63</sup> If faith is to function in a motion corresponding to the motion of grace, just as God's grace is unceasing and continuous in its constancy, so too our motion of faith toward God is exercised by a continuous step-by-step dependence.

## Concluding Remarks

In this essay, we have been attending to the way Torrance understands the constitution of human beings as participants in grace. The shape of grace, rooted in the Incarnation and grounded in the heart of God, sets the dynamic, yet consistent, framework which encompasses all the insanity and beauty of our human existence. The constancy of grace is interrupted neither by human hostility nor by divine judgment upon sin, for God's judgment is itself grace in motion and the Father, Son, and Spirit never cease to be the love that they are.

In Torrance's theological tool kit, the *imago Dei* expresses the reality of grace with boldness and clarity and so enhances our insight into the mystery of God's relentless love for human beings. The concept of the *imago Dei* gives powerful

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., "In that responsive motion alone does man find his true life and destiny."

<sup>61</sup> Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 70.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 12:9; Gal. 1:16; 2:20; Col. 1:27-29; 1 Tim. 1:16.

<sup>63</sup> Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 174.

expression to Torrance's understanding of the onto-relational constitution of human creatures, and provides a fruitful metaphor for how we can intelligently and consciously participate in grace and so enjoy the incredible gift of sharing in the Son's relation with the Father in the Spirit.

In this short sketch, I have also demonstrated the way the analogy of grace, grounded as it is in the person of Jesus Christ, provides the fundamental form and content for Torrance's exposition of the *imago Dei* within his theological anthropology. My argument has been that, for Torrance, this christological-grounded methodology is the case with all doctrines that have to do with the relation between God and creatures. In the words of Torrance himself, it is "in the relation of the deity to the humanity in Jesus Christ that we are to look [for] ... the interior logic" which guides the whole of dogmatics.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Torrance, *Predestination in Christ*, 127.





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