

# THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF T. F. TORRANCE

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**Abstract:** *The subject of this essay is the Holy Spirit and the Christian experience of Spiritual formation in the theology of T. F. Torrance. While a full account of this subject would require significant exposition along a multitude of dogmatic loci, the present essay will limit its scope to three primary tasks. First, I will establish several **distinguishing foundational principles** within which a Torrancean approach to Spiritual formation will most properly take place. Second, I will offer a creative account of participation in Christ by the Spirit (i.e. Spiritual formation) by way of a **biblical reflection** from the Gospel of Matthew. Finally, building on the first two steps, I will recommend a few **practical trajectories** formation in Christ should and must take from a Torrancean perspective. It is my hope that the following might serve as the basis for further reflection on the beautiful theological vision T. F. Torrance has gifted to those of us who follow in his wake and — even more importantly — experiential integration in the daily lives of the children of God.*

The subject of this essay is the Holy Spirit and the Christian experience of Spiritual formation in the theology of T. F. Torrance. While a full account of this subject would require significant exposition along a multitude of dogmatic loci, the present essay will limit its scope to three primary tasks. First, I will establish several distinguishing foundational principles within which a Torrancean approach to Spiritual formation will most properly take place. Second, I will offer a creative

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account of participation in Christ by the Spirit (i.e. Spiritual formation) by way of a biblical reflection from the Gospel of Matthew. Finally, building on the first two steps, I will recommend a few practical trajectories formation in Christ should and must take from a Torrancean perspective. What I propose here is not meant to be exhaustive by any means, and much that could be said will necessarily remain unsaid. It is my hope, however, that the following might serve as the basis for further reflection on the beautiful theological vision T. F. Torrance has gifted to those of us who follow in his wake and — even more importantly — experiential integration in the daily lives of the children of God.

### **Foundational principles**

Given Torrance's intuitive theological framework, grounded as it is in Incarnation and Trinity, we rightly begin by clarifying the subject matter with which we are concerned. Accuracy requires that the words we use be understood to refer transparently to the realities Torrance would intend. This is particularly important when describing a subject as culturally popularized as "spiritual formation" has become in the West over the past thirty years. For this purpose, I offer two basic assertions (one negative and one positive) regarding the subject of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual formation as it would and should be understood within T. F. Torrance's theological world.

*Negatively*, Spiritual formation is neither the formation of the *human spirit*, nor the formation of the individual's *spiritual life*.

*Positively*: Spiritual formation *is* formation *by the Spirit through* participation *in Christ*.

### **Spiritual formation is neither the formation of the *human spirit*, nor the formation of the individual's *spiritual life***

We begin with what is likely the most surprising and counter-cultural assertion. *Spiritual formation is neither the formation of the human spirit, nor the formation of the individual's spiritual life*; it cannot be, because for T. F. Torrance

there is no autonomous "self" existing apart from Christ on the strength of its own nature; each person is necessarily a self-in-relation, thanks to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Torrance arrives at this anthropological conviction through Christology. Human nature is defined and determined by Jesus Christ, and as such, the only human nature that exists is his. In Jesus Christ, "human nature was taken up to share in the eternal communion of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup> By grace, the being of human beings — whether they know it or not — is "grounded in Christ and ontologically bound to his humanity."<sup>3</sup> What we often refer to as the "spirit" of humanity is not thought of as some third entity in the constitution of the human (as in "body, soul and spirit"), nor is it some "spark of the divine" the human possesses; rather, it is "the ontological qualification of his soul and indeed of his whole creaturely being."<sup>4</sup> That is, while human beings are Spiritual beings, our status as creatures who belong to the Spirit is one of utter dependence. The "self" we are only has existence as a "self-in-relation" with the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. We exist in the humanity of the incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Lord. As those who exist within Christ's humanity, the way of our being is analogically related to the way of his being, such that the way of our "participation in grace" correlates to the hypostatic uniting of humanity and divinity in Christ. How did the eternal Son enact his existence *as* a real human being? Torrance writes, "the human nature of Jesus was personalized or given *enhypostatic* reality in the

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<sup>1</sup> I must give credit to Chris E. W. Green for helping me (via email correspondence) to formulate this sentence in a way that summarizes in a very succinct way the themes of this sub-section.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 241.

<sup>3</sup> T. F. Torrance, "Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy," *SJT* 39.4 [1986], 481. Since the Creator Word became flesh, "we must think of the being of every man, whether he believes or not, as grounded in Christ and ontologically bound to his humanity."

<sup>4</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1999), 110. The apostle Paul makes this same point by contrasting living "according to the Spirit" with living "according to the flesh." The choice is stark: turning toward the relation we have with the Spirit of God, or flexing our faux autonomous self (flesh) which only leads to the death of non-being (Rom 8:1-15). In 1 Corinthians 2:10-15, Paul contrasts those who "receive the gifts of God's Spirit" with those who are "unspiritual" or "natural." Our choice is not being filled with the Spirit of God vs. being filled with our own spirit; rather, the choice Paul presents is life in the Spirit or animal/fleshly life.

Person of the Son of God become man.”<sup>5</sup> As it was and is with Jesus, so it is with us:

[M]an and God are related *proportionaliter* to the relation of Man and God in hypostatic union in Christ Jesus. That means that a Christian doctrine of the Word of God and human decision, of election and human faith, of the Divine Presence and the worldly element in the sacrament, etc., will be grounded entirely upon the hypostatic union as its true and only valid analogy; that is, upon the central relation and union of God and Man of which every other relation must partake.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, analogous to the *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* of Christ’s humanity, our humanity has no independent existence apart from God’s creative activity in Christ.<sup>7</sup> As there is no independent or prior human person which precedes the Person of the Son making Jesus who he was (and is), so also there is no independent or prior human spirit which precedes the Spirit of Christ making each and every human being who they are. Both unions (Christ’s and ours) are related to the rhythm of the *an/en-hypostasia*, and both are realized through one and the same Spirit. While the historical event of Christ’s union with us has become an objective and universal truth encompassing and embracing all humanity, our union with Christ is an event that happens personally, and in our own spatio-temporal

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 230.

<sup>6</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 114. This provides a christologically grounded notion of our shared existence which is bounded by the Chalcedonian safeguards. We are neither absorbed (*inconfuse* [not confused]; *immutabiliter* [not changed]) into the triune life, nor are we completely external (*indivise* [not divided]; *inseparabiliter* [not separated]).

<sup>7</sup> “The action of God in the incarnation can be seen to be an act which was wholly the work of God’s Grace (corresponding to the *anhypostasia*), and yet an act which results in a full and real human act (corresponding to the *enhypostasia*).” - Geordie W. Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace and Participation – An Entry into the Theology of T. F. Torrance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 68.

history.<sup>8</sup> It was the Spirit who overshadowed, empowered, and sustained Jesus before the Father in the fidelity of communion and the faithfulness of self-giving love. Now, in his ascended humanity at the Father's side, Jesus sends forth the same Spirit to lead us into the fullness of the same self-giving triune life and love. If Jesus himself has no autonomy separate from his relationship with the Father, neither can we. The life we live, we live inside the faithfulness of his perfect response. Human existence, the life of each and every human being, is ontologically and irrevocably hidden with Christ in God.<sup>9</sup>

The human self, or spirit, is "a dynamic correlate to the Spirit of God" in whom we live and move and have our being.<sup>10</sup> To be the *imago Dei* they are made to be, human creatures ontologically require the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> In Christian Spiritual formation, the one with whom we have to do is not some generic concept of the "spirit" or the "spiritual," but with the "personalizing being" of the personal Holy

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<sup>8</sup> Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace*, 154: "Precisely because human participation corresponds to the *an/en-hypostasia*, it does not abrogate our creaturely being; all the benefits of Christ — his sonship, new humanity, new creation, adoption, justification, sanctification, regeneration, the divine life and love — are shared through our union with him in his human (not divine) nature."

<sup>9</sup> "We are with Jesus beside God, for we are gathered up in him and included in his own self-presentation to the Father." - Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 135–36. It may be helpful here to note that Torrance sees no contradiction in holding two paradoxical affirmations: first, the affirmation that Christ's union with human beings is universal such that *all* are included; and second, "universalism," in the sense that all will *necessarily* personally embrace the truth of that union, is in no way a mandatory corollary. To put it differently, the indicative of our objective, *anhypostatic unio Christi* does not negate the imperative of our subjective, *enhypostatic* actualization of that *unio* through personal encounter and response to Christ. If anything, the indicative heightens and radicalizes the necessity of the imperative.

<sup>10</sup> Torrance, *Soul and Person*, 110.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace and Participation*, 151-53, "The Human Being as an Onto-Relational Being." On this basis, the human spirit is a way of referring to the ontological (and therefore structural) constitution of human beings: creatures who require the Holy Spirit in order to be what they were made to be as *imago Dei*.

Spirit.<sup>12</sup> The implications of this reality are profoundly central to human identity, and carry ramifications for the contemporary conversation and practice of Spiritual formation which are obvious and immediate: the “s” in “Spiritual” must always be capitalized. One’s “Spiritual life” simply refers to the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. Bluntly put, uncapitalized “spiritual” formation is not Christian and is alien to the New Testament Scriptures.<sup>13</sup>

This negative assertion, that Spiritual formation is neither the formation of the human spirit, nor the formation of the individual’s spiritual life, plays an important role in Torrance’s overall understanding of personal growth. To the extent that we do not know “what” we are, the methodologies we create will be based on false assumptions invariably leading to warped and warping practices. At its heart, formation is not a matter of inspiration, but of identity. Practices and methods derived from a center in the autonomous self, no matter how noble and good, miss the mark. Spiritual formation, theologically and rightly understood, involves our consent to let the Spirit of Christ be Lord of our formation. It is not our project. When we place ourselves as lord and judge over our formation of our spirit, we stand at the center of our selves and, as such, betray ourselves, malforming ourselves by the willpower of our willfulness. This malformation is evident in the anxiety, guilt, and shame which pervades the culture of so many Christian individuals, families, and institutions.

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<sup>12</sup> “The Relevance of the Doctrine of the Spirit for Ecumenical Theology (Reply of Professor Thomas F. Torrance to his Critics),” Q34 (Edinburgh, Scotland, November 20, 1963), Thomas F. Torrance Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library, Box 135. This document, marked “for private distribution only” was an extended written response of 68 paragraphs which Torrance penned to address specific concerns and critiques to his Schlink-Festschrift article. German text, *Oekumenische Rundschau*, 1963. Reprinted in *Theology in Reconstruction*, 229-39.

<sup>13</sup> I learned this while at Regent College under the passionate and scholarly teaching of the late Gordon Fee. See *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994): “*Pneumatikos* refers to what belongs to the Spirit, as over against what is merely *psychikos* (‘natural’) or *sarkikos* (‘belonging to the flesh’)” (642). “To translate *pneumatikos* as ‘spiritual,’ understood either as dualistic (belonging to the heavenly as opposed to the earthly sphere) or as some merely vague, nonphysical idea, is to miss Paul’s usage by a wide margin” (643). The one exception to this rule is Ephesians 6:12. It is also noteworthy that in Galatians 4:3 and Colossians 2:8, 20 the word “spiritual” is not in the Greek text at all, but has been inserted by translators.

**Spiritual formation is formation by the Spirit through participation in Christ**

Having clarified, at least in part, what we do not mean by spirit or spiritual, we can now speak positively about Spiritual formation as the formation of the human person *by the Spirit*. In Spiritual formation, the primary and dominant agent at work is the Lordly Person of the Holy Spirit, sent from the Father with the Son.

As the one processing from the Father, the Spirit is *Lord*: "God in all his glory, majesty and sheer Godness."<sup>14</sup> As Lord, the Spirit is present to the creature to realize (sanctify) and bring to completion (perfect) the creative purpose of God in the life of creatures.<sup>15</sup> As Christ is the head of his Church, so the Spirit is Lord of the Spiritual formation of his people. We do not possess the Spirit; it is the Spirit who possesses us. Though far above all, the Spirit does not violate in possessing. In the ceaseless freedom of God's self-giving love, the Lordly Spirit is the means by whom the triune God "draws near to us and draws us near to himself."<sup>16</sup>

As the one who processes from the Father *with the Son*, the Spirit is the intensely *personal presence* of God. The Spirit sent by Christ is mediated "through the human nature and experience of the Incarnate Son ... not as isolated and naked Spirit, but as Spirit charged with all the experience of Jesus."<sup>17</sup> Through the Spirit whom he breathes, Christ perfects and finishes in his people what he has pioneered and authored in himself.

What Torrance wants to preserve and lift up, and the reason for such an extended theological opening to what is meant to be a practical essay, is the essential truth that "the Gift and the Giver are indivisibly one."<sup>18</sup> To share in the Holy Spirit is to share in the inner communion (the "closed circle of knowing")

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<sup>14</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 230.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-223.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, revised edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 119.

<sup>17</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 246-7.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 140.

between the Father and the Son and the Son and the Father.<sup>19</sup> Every biblical term in relation to the Holy Spirit and human creatures (indwell, abide, fill, empower, gift, fruit, etc.) is essentially another way of referring to the communion of the Father and the Son. "The communion of God *is* the Holy Spirit."<sup>20</sup> The love of God — the love enjoyed within God — is the same Holy Spirit which has been poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5). In the Spirit, we are literally given "*koinonia* in the Son's *koinonia* with the Father."<sup>21</sup>

Spiritual formation is formation *by the Spirit* through *participation* in Christ. The "space" within which formation by the Spirit takes place is a *relational* space, and the relation with which we are engaged is Christ. Consequently, it is Jesus Christ who should occupy our attention, not the Spirit *per se*. While the Holy Spirit is the curator and illuminator of the communion, properly speaking, Christian formation is formation by the Father, Son, and Spirit together. It is *trinitarian* formation. As such, the abode, or habitation, of formation is communion in the communion of the Trinity, *koinonia* in the Son's *koinonia* with the Father in the Spirit. Spiritual formation is sharing in the *communion* of the Son with the Father through the Spirit.

The purpose of our *communion* in the *communion* of the Father and the Son is nothing other than... *communion*. God's only desire is to share himself with free creatures who willingly surrender themselves to that love, and so become love themselves. To become love as God is love is the essence of sanctification, and the essence of being human. As such, whatever language one might use to describe Spiritual growth (sanctification, discipleship, obedience, faithfulness, etc.), the true measure of Christian maturity will never be other than the fidelity of love. This is why, as Eric Flett has pointed out, when Torrance speaks of the work of the Spirit

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<sup>19</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 116. Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 208-9; Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 226.

<sup>20</sup> Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace*, 121.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-4: "Sanctification therefore takes place as we share in the *koinonia* of the Son with the Father through the Spirit." Torrance can assert such a bold claim without sliding into panentheism or pantheism because the union we have with Christ is in his *human* (not divine) nature, and as such the Creator-creature distinction is not blurred. See n. 7 above.



upon human creatures, he tends to prefer relational terms like “humanization or personalization” rather than “sanctification.”<sup>22</sup> By way of *communion*, the “personalizing Spirit” makes us “personalized persons.” In Christ, there is no discrepancy between ends and means: the Trinity never uses impersonal means to achieve personal ends. The personalization of human persons is achieved through the personal activity of the personalizing Spirit. “Far from crushing our creaturely nature or damaging our personal existence, the indwelling presence of God through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit has the effect of healing and restoring and deepening human personal being.”<sup>23</sup>

The journey of healing and restoring and deepening our personal being is a never-ending endeavor. In Torrance’s vision of salvation, the goal is not to get somewhere, or to achieve some level of personal holiness. Holiness or freedom or healing are not “things” one can pocket or store away. The journey of holiness is never-ending, not because the standard of perfection is so high, but because relationships of love reveal horizons that are infinitely knowable.

At its heart, this is a matter of identity. The work of the Spirit in Spiritual formation is not to meet some moralistic code or to emulate the high ethics of Jesus; rather, it is to teach us to live in harmony *with* Jesus, inside the onto-relational<sup>24</sup> truth of our human nature which is “set within the Father-Son

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<sup>22</sup> Eric G. Flett, *Persons, Powers, and Pluralities: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (Cambridge: James Clark, 2012), 44.

<sup>23</sup> Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 230.

<sup>24</sup> The phrase “onto-relations” was coined by Torrance to give expression to the being-constituting (or “substantive”) relations of the triune persons. The relations between the three divine Persons belong to what they essentially are in themselves such that they are ontologically who and what they are in their indivisible love relation to one another. This has particular implications for our understanding of “person” or “personhood,” such that “‘Person’ is an onto-relational concept.” - Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 157. Accordingly, human beings, as creatures inextricably related to God through the Holy Spirit, must also be understood onto-relationally. See my essay “Is it Time for a Reformation of Spiritual Formation? Recovering Ontology” in the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, 2018, Vol. 11 (1), 84.

relationship of Christ.”<sup>25</sup> The true test of one’s identity in Christ is located in the thought center:

[I]f anyone... thinks from a centre in oneself, governed by the devising of one’s own reason, then one is bound to think of [God] in an unworthy or irreligious way (*asebos*) — which Athanasius designated *mythologia*. Either you think from out of a mind centered in God through union with the mind of the Lord Jesus, or you think from out of a mind centered in yourself, alienated from God and inwardly hostile to the truth incarnate in the Lord Jesus, that is, in a way that is finally governed by the unregenerate and unbaptized reason.<sup>26</sup>

This is the metric by which growth in the Christian life will ultimately be measured: thinking from a center in God, or “thinking in Christ.” When we think from a center in God and not self we increasingly perceive God in all things and all things in God.

That transformation in our inner self in which we learn to think from a centre in God rather than from a centre in ourselves is the basic reorientation that takes place in the church of Jesus Christ. *Christian discipleship is the disciplined habit of thinking and acting in Christ*, for he is the one place where we may really worship God and believe in him as our Father.<sup>27</sup>

Torrance is fully aware of how radically difficult any true Spiritual growth will be. “As you let the truth of the gospel have its way with you, you will find the very shape and structure of your mind beginning to change. That is what the gospel is

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<sup>25</sup> Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection*, 69. “The ascension means the exaltation of man into the life of God and on to the throne of God.... There we reach the goal of the incarnation.... We are with Jesus beside God, for we are gathered up in him and included in his own self-presentation to the Father. This is the ultimate end of creation and redemption revealed in the Covenant of Grace and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.... We ourselves are given a down-payment of that, as it were, in the gift of the Spirit bestowed on us by the ascended man from the throne of God, so that through the Spirit we may already have communion in the consummated reality which will be fully actualized in us in the resurrection and redemption of the body.” - Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection*, 135–36.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 446.

<sup>27</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 376. Italics mine.

about, a *metanoia*, a radical repentant rethinking of everything before the face of Jesus Christ."<sup>28</sup> All thinking we do or did which is not "before the face of Jesus Christ" needs to be "rethought" and repented of.

"Freedom is only possible face to face with Jesus Christ."<sup>29</sup> This is one reason Torrance so appreciated Calvin's use of the mirror metaphor in his theology of the *imago Dei*. "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."<sup>30</sup> *Communion*, like a mirror, calls for a continuous motion of reorientation and turning towards the proper object. The *imago* only reflects God when it faces God. The Spirit's role in the mirror metaphor is to woo our turning, drawing our gaze toward God and back into relationship as the child we are. As we obediently consent again and again to the Spirit's invitation to turn our hearts and faces towards Christ, "personal forms of reflection are begotten in us."<sup>31</sup> From Torrance's perspective, the central concern of Spiritual formation is personal through and through — "the translation of the Father-Son relation in Christ into the daily life of the children of God."<sup>32</sup>

Before we leap from theological reflection to the important and necessary question of practice, we do well to do as the author of Hebrews instructs, and first fix our gaze upon Jesus. If anthropology is derived from Christology, then formation of human persons by the Spirit must first attend to the way of the Spirit in the humanity of Christ. To that task we now turn.

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<sup>28</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 446.

<sup>29</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 123. Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Nottingham: Intervarsity, 2008), 187. Cf. Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace*, chapter 4, "The imago Dei and the 'proleptic self.'"

<sup>30</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 36.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 207.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "The Atonement. The Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order," in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed., *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1992), 254.

## **Formation in Christ: Jesus' desire to share his sonship with us (Matthew 11:25-30)<sup>33</sup>**

What was the Spirit's role in Jesus' formation?

One of the striking features of the gospel accounts of the life of Christ is that Jesus refers to himself, not by his name, but almost exclusively by his relationship to another. Jesus does not seem to know himself as a self apart from his continuous relation with his Father. He is a trinitarian from the inside. Jesus does not believe in the Trinity; he lives it. He is the "beloved Son" (of the Father). This is his identity, gifted to him by the Spirit. It is inside this love that he loves. The love he receives and returns with the Father is Life, eternal life, kingdom life, the life of the love of God. The love of the Father for the Son cannot be separated from Jesus' ongoing reception of the communing activity of the Spirit in his life.

Jesus loves the Father, and he knows the Father loves him. He also recognizes that his relationship with the Father is both unique and exclusive. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus indicates repeatedly that his primary work is to reveal the Father. The Father and the Father's kingdom dominate Jesus' teaching, and the Father and the Father's concerns also dominate Jesus' own way of life. His entire life, from start to finish, is one of complete dependence upon and attention to the Father through the Spirit.

Matthew 11:25–30 (NRSV) is a prime example:

<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

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<sup>33</sup> Exegetical disclaimer: I draw on this text for illustrative purposes, and my description extends beyond Torrance's explicit exegesis of this text, though I believe it is faithful to Torrance's overall vision of the Christian life. Alternative interpretations need not detract from the larger point.

Jesus here is speaking about “the mutual relation of knowing and being” which he has with the Father.<sup>34</sup> But the primary purpose of this passage is not as a proof-text to prove the divinity of Jesus. Rather, in this passage Jesus is letting his disciples in on the prayer of his heart. By praying aloud, he is sharing with them what it is like to be Jesus. To be Jesus is to be childlike. To be Jesus is to trust the Father rather than his own wisdom. To be Jesus is to be entrusted by the Father with all things because the Son always seeks to do the Father’s will. To be Jesus is to know that he is completely known and loved by the Father. To be Jesus is to know himself in the light of the Father’s love for him and to love the Father in return. To be Jesus is to know his home is in the Father’s love. To be fair, Jesus has never not known himself at home in the Father’s love. We, on the other hand, have strayed much and have developed attachments to many other gods, yet Jesus is able to share what he has and knows in the Father. To be Jesus is to not only be able, but willing, to reveal the Father.

<sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

In Jesus Christ, the Father, Son, and Spirit are inviting us into their relationship. To be clear, when Jesus issues this invitation, he is not offering to be his hearers’ workout coach. The yoke he is inviting them to discover is not simply the yoke of his teachings or a new moral code. To interpret the passage that way would be to miss the entire thrust not only of this passage, but of the gospel itself. The yoke which Jesus is offering is *the same yoke which he himself wears*. It is the yoke of his relationship with the Father. Jesus knows this yoke firsthand. It is the “Rule” he keeps which also keeps him. To Jesus, inside their mutual relation of love, the yoke he receives from the Father is easy and light. Jesus invites disciples to follow him,

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<sup>34</sup> Matthew 11:25-30 offers us an explicit bridge connecting the God’s knowing of himself and our knowing of God. “[T]he mutual relation of knowing and being between the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ constitutes the ontological ground for our knowing of God, for in and through it our knowledge of God the Father is objectively rooted in the eternal being of God himself.” - Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 59; see Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace*, 7.

but only as he is also following the Father. The lesson he wants them to learn from him is what it is like to be a child in the Father's kingdom.

What Jesus has by nature, we are being included in by grace — *through his humanity*. The love Jesus has known from the Father, he would share with us: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." The joy he experiences in the face of the Father, he would share with us: "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:9-11). The shalom Jesus knows which permeates his soul, he would share with us: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (John 14:27). Jesus has not come simply to reveal the Father to us; *he has come to share his own communion with the Father with us* — his own mind, eyes, Spirit, his whole being.<sup>35</sup> Jesus wants us to see what he sees, know what he knows, and experience what he experiences when he looks into the Father's eyes and knows he is loved.

Inside Jesus' relationship with the Father there is no envy, there is no jealousy, there is no anxiety or anger, there is no comparison or competition, there is no fear or shame, there is no hiding or self-protection. Perfect love casts out all those symptoms of lovelessness and replaces them with joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, as well as self-abandonment, compassion, humility, justice, mercy, singleness of heart, peacemaking, advocacy, and solidarity.<sup>36</sup>

When Jesus declares "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father apart from me" (John 14:6), he is not telling us what we need to believe; he is saying, "This is how you enter and experience a relationship with the Father like mine." If we are to ever become like Jesus, *the only way* is by *his way*,

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<sup>35</sup> Without abrogating our creatureliness, we participate by grace in what Jesus knows and has by nature. This is pointed to in the Pauline language of our adoption and constitution as joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14–17, 29; Ephesians 1:3–14; Galatians 4:4–7). See Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 241.

<sup>36</sup> The latter half of this list of qualities I believe marked and arose from Jesus' intimate relationship with his Father is drawn from Matthew 5's Sermon on the Mount. As love summarizes and also gives rise to the variety of fruit of the Spirit, so I would suggest poverty of spirit ("self-abandonment") summarizes and also gives rise to the marks of a blissful life with God which follows.

by *his* truth, by *his* life; that is, by accepting his invitation to join him in the yoke of his relationship with the Father. The yoke of the Father (with the Son in the Spirit) *is* salvation — *is* eternal life. Our great problem is we do not know the Father. Blinded by the hurts and fears which have infiltrated and permeate this world, we project onto God all manner of horrible images and assumptions. The result is we hide in fear, and our fear renders us incapable of being human the way that Jesus is human.<sup>37</sup>

Knowing we are like sheep in need of a shepherd, Jesus's invitation is to follow him and let him be our teacher. As we walk with him and listen to him, letting him share the light of his mind with us and inviting him into our own shadowy minds, we come to know the love of the Father through the loving eyes of the Son. Jesus shares his Spirit with us to assure our orphan spirit that we are in fact beloved children of the Father, giving us bold assurance to cry "Abba" (John 14:15-17; John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). By this way, we come to know and love ourselves through the loving eyes of the Father. As we learn to see as Jesus sees, we too will love as he loves. In fact, we only love like the God-who-loves by being in relational communion with that God such that we learn to love by being loved: *he loves our love into being*.<sup>38</sup> We only become self-giving like the God-for-others by being in relational communion with that God such that we experience him as radically self-giving to us. This is the way our minds are converted and transformed. The New Testament calls this having "the mind of Christ."

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<sup>37</sup> In Jesus, the way of his being corresponds perfectly to the truth of his being. Sadly, we often fail to enact our humanity in correspondence to the way Jesus enacts his (as a faithful and trusting Son of the Father). As such, the way of our being is out of alignment with the truth of our being as it is in Christ.

<sup>38</sup> I first heard this turn of phrase from Chris E. W. Green. See *Surprised by God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 19.

## **Trajectories of Torrancean formation: learning to think and act in Christ**

If Christian discipleship is, as Torrance defines it, “the disciplined habit of thinking and acting in Christ,”<sup>39</sup> what are the concrete ways a disciple cultivates that lifestyle and mindset? How, in fact, does the Father-Son relation in Christ get translated into the daily life of the children of God?<sup>40</sup> How can we actively (or passively) participate in the Son’s relation with the Father through the Spirit? How does formation by the Spirit actually happen?

We can begin to frame a response to these questions by returning to Jesus’ self-description: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). If the life of Jesus is the communion of love he shares with the Father in the Spirit, then to know God’s love, we need truth (not lies) about God, and we need a practical (not abstract) means of relating to that love. To put it another way, for our hearts to know love, we need our minds and bodies to come into alignment with the love we seek to know. In its most simplistic form, we could say: the Truth of Jesus + the Way of Jesus = the Life of Jesus. This basic rubric can help focus our energies when it comes to how we think about formation.

With this set of tracks as our guide, we will consider a few trajectories formation in the truth and way of Christ will need to take in the life of God’s people.<sup>41</sup>

### **Trajectory #1: Cultivate “We-ness”**

The truth of our being, within Torrance’s onto-relational anthropology, is that “I” am, in fact, a “We.” I am neither self-created, nor self-grounded; not only am I incapable of being myself by myself, I am not myself by myself. My self, my *true* self, is myself-in-relation with the Trinity, a self who shares in the Son’s relation

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<sup>39</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 376.

<sup>40</sup> Torrance, “The Atonement and Moral Order,” 254.

<sup>41</sup> The three trajectories I offer here are by no means exhaustive; they are, I would suggest, foundational.



with the Father through the Spirit. As we have noted, this truth of our being is true whether we know or believe or acknowledge it or not. When I am led by the Spirit, I am my true self; when I am not led by the Spirit, I am an adapted self, a self-made self, a false self. Spiritual formation in the Torrancean way involves our conscious lived sense of identity catching up with the truth of our being.

Since the truth of our being is that we are fundamentally and ontologically a "self-in-relationship," rather than looking within to "find oneself," we do well to look to the one in whom we have a joint identity.<sup>42</sup> Christ is the Mediator and primary pole of our entire humanity, not just our "spiritual life."<sup>43</sup> If our real life is a shared life, and if our "sharing partner" is the human Son of God, then it behooves us to cultivate a posture of "We-ness" with Christ.

While such a posture involves one's imagination, there is nothing imaginary about it. For Torrance, this is living according to the truth with a "relentless objectivity... in which you do not think out of your own self-centeredness but out of a centre in the incarnate Word who summons you to leave all and follow Him."<sup>44</sup> Such objectivity means recognizing that one's true self "I" is the secondary pole, and the "I" that strives to take over the primary pole is really the false self and needs to be crucified. We-ness, by definition, involves death to the "I-centered self." My problem is not simply that I do not do the right things; it is that I insist on drawing from the wrong well. Rather than abiding "in Christ," I remain "in Geordie."<sup>45</sup> When I try to be my self *by myself*, I abandon my true ontology in favor of a false self of my own creation. This "self" is the "puppet self" that insists on

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<sup>42</sup> Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 247.

<sup>43</sup> Besides, as we have already noted, there is no such thing as a "spiritual life." There is only life enlivened by the Spirit who is Lord of all "life."

<sup>44</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 70.

<sup>45</sup> While effort and discipline are important qualities to cultivate, *the way* one cultivates them can make all the difference between life "in Christ" and life "in the self." It is at this point where so many Spiritual formation models and systems go wrong by adopting what Roger Newell calls an "appropriation-centered" response to God. "In appropriation-centered models, the subject is 'thrown back upon himself' ... to achieve tangible fruits of repentance [or] to attain an inner state of faith or serenity." - Roger Newell, "Participation and Atonement," in *Christ in our Place*, ed. Trevor A Hart and Daniel Thimell (Exeter, UK: The Paternoster Press and Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1989), 96.

manufacturing its own handcrafted identity; the “performance self” bent on justifying its own existence to do great things for God; the “poser self” that thinks it knows what is good and what is evil without needing to listen to God. Whatever form our “flesh self” takes, it is always a denial of the truth of our being.

How does one cultivate We-ness? By turning toward our Teacher and participating in the mind of Christ.<sup>46</sup>

### **Trajectory #2: Sharing in the mind of Christ – from monologue to dialogue**

If the goal of Spiritual formation is that the communion of the incarnate Son with the Father be translated into the language of our daily lives, then the locus of the battle will be in the mind.<sup>47</sup> For the human Jesus, communion with the Father was hard fought. Like the rest of us, Jesus had to “work out his salvation with fear and trembling (blood and tears).”<sup>48</sup> Faced with terrible trials and temptations, *his secret weapon was prayer*. Jesus did not just “say his prayers”; Jesus lived a life of prayer. He never thought of himself as alone or without the Father. With every breath, prayer was the means by which he held fast to his identity.

One of Torrance’s common catchphrases for Jesus’ prayer-communion with the Father is “the mind of Christ.”<sup>49</sup> If the same “basic soteriological inversion” is to be “pushed through... the whole of our mental system,” we too must take the “way of Christ’s humanity.”<sup>50</sup> The radical reschematization involved in such an endeavor is impossible on one’s own. In fact, our persistent insistence to go it alone is the very aspect of us which needs to be reschematized. Our fundamental problem is

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<sup>46</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 238.

<sup>47</sup> See Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace*, 156-160; 206-208. While Torrance certainly identifies the “mind” with the executive functioning of the intellect, even more so, the “mind” in Torrance’s thought is a relational reality. The most important purpose and function of the mind is communion with the Creator. The distinguishing mark of the mind of Christ is fidelity and faithfulness. The mind of Christ is most fully expressed in us when “the Spirit of the Son makes us cry with him, ‘Abba! Father’” (Romans 8:16).

<sup>48</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 115-16.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

the discrepancy between the truth of our being (which is securely bound up with the Father, Son, and Spirit) and the way we enact our being. Weak and wandering as we are, it doesn't take much to get sidetracked from the ground of our identity as beloved children of the Father in Christ. The heart of this discrepancy has to do with prayer; or to frame it differently: to what or whose voice one is listening. Evil works by whispering lies: you are not... worthy, good enough, important, acceptable, there yet, smart, etc. If we agree with these lies, they get to be added to the playlist that runs in the background of our minds.

If the heart of sin is this inward-turned monologue,<sup>51</sup> then the opposite of sin - and the way of being truly human — is through *dialogue* or conversation with God (i.e. *prayer!*). This is the way of Jesus. He trusted in the Lord with all his heart, not leaning on his own understanding. In all his ways he submitted through the Spirit to the Father, and the Father made his paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6). Our problem is not so much *what* we know, but *how* we come to know what we know. Do we know with God or without God? Does our knowing come from inside the circle of our life in the Trinity or from without? Jesus' way of knowing was a "receptive knowing" in which knowledge was not something he constructed alone, but was given relationally. We follow in Jesus' footsteps when we include God in the conversation and acknowledge our dependence upon him. What might it look like for us to submit our monologue-way of knowing for the humanizing fellowship of dialogical knowing with the Father, Son, Spirit?

Since we do all our thinking and acting in the presence of the risen Lord, rather than addressing questions of faith and discipleship in a form that presumes the absence and voicelessness of Christ, perhaps the place to begin is to speak as if Jesus were actually in the room. For example, rather than asking the exemplary question, "What would Jesus do?" or even the more present-tense question, "What is Jesus doing?" perhaps we might inquire of him directly: "Jesus, what are you doing here and now?" "Jesus, in this situation, what do you know that I need to

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<sup>51</sup> Bonhoeffer famously noted Eve's conversation with the serpent and subsequent decision to eat of the tree all took place within the context of "the first conversation about God." Rather than talking to God, rather than being with God, Adam and Eve begin to act as if God himself was not present. - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3: Temptation* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 69.

know?" "Jesus, what do *you* see that I need to see with you?" "Jesus, who are you loving that you want me to love with you?" Questioning of this kind invites an internal shifting of the poles. When we ask questions about the Father, Son, and Spirit in the third person, we position ourselves at the primary pole; however, when our questioning shifts to the second person, there is also a shift of mode where God now stands at the primary pole as lead-Subject, and we assume our rightful place as secondary: learners dependent upon God to know the good from the evil.<sup>52</sup> Jesus makes it clear that this is the kind of posture he expects of those who follow him as Lord when he communicates to his disciples their need for 24/7 counseling: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another paraclete [advocate/helper/counselor] to help you and be with you forever" (John 14:16, trans. altered). In other words, if we are to live as children of the Father in the way of Jesus, we can no longer live as if we are alone or on our own. Even our praying does not have its origination inside our separate selves, but in the Spirit of Christ with and within us. It is, as Rowan Williams has said, "the prayer of Christ, God's own relation to God, [coming] alive in me."<sup>53</sup>

Through the Spirit, we are able to have communion with Christ in which we truly "share with him his mind" and learn from him to think, worship, and serve in a God-centered way (Colossians 1:19–22; Philippians 2:5, Romans 12:1–2).<sup>54</sup> In communion, we become more and more "permeable to Christ" and the fruit of his Spirit,<sup>55</sup> and begin to see with his eyes, to notice what he notices, to listen to what he listens to, to pay attention to what he pays attention to, to celebrate what he celebrates, to recognize the sacred presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in every person, in every moment, and in every place....<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting in this description that we continue to exist as "subjects." Our subjectivity, however, is submitted to the objectivity of Christ as Subject.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Green, *Surprised by God*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 113.

<sup>55</sup> Green, *Surprised by God*, 5. The phrase "permeable to Christ" is a brilliant image of the onto-relational nature of character transformation.

<sup>56</sup> See Baxter Kruger, *The Mediation of Christ* (perichoresis.org, 2020).

Such a conversion and transformation is only possible through “incessant prayer.”<sup>57</sup> The “spiritually attuned” mind, Torrance observes,

cannot be gained apart from a constant self-offering in rational worship to God, for it is through that inner relation between prayer and the transforming renewal of our minds, that we may be so tuned in to God that we fulfil our service in the rational way acceptable to him.<sup>58</sup>

This “soteriological inversion” of the human mind “is something that has to go on throughout the whole of our life,” requiring that we must “wear the glasses of the Word all the time... continually transcending our judgments.”<sup>59</sup> Prayer that is truly prayer turns toward God with a desire to hear God’s voice more than our own. To “wear the glasses of the Word” (hear God’s voice) requires a willing consent on our part to open our hearts and minds to God’s perspective (the mind of Christ). “It is a never-ending discipleship in repentant rethinking.”<sup>60</sup> Tuning into the mind of Christ literally requires a baptism of the mind — the death and resurrection of our “unbaptized reason.”<sup>61</sup> As we remain alert and attentive to the movements of our incarnate risen Lord, watching and listening in a kind of “spiritual insomnia,” our alienated minds are healed, renewed, and sanctified through the mindset of Christ.<sup>62</sup>

The work of the Spirit is to take what is Jesus’ and share it with us. However, Jesus cannot share his new life with us if we will not share our old life with him. Unacknowledged attachments dull our hearts, anesthetizing us from the river of love which upholds our being. Hiding our false self’s motivations, thoughts, and

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<sup>57</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 446.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 445, 447.

<sup>59</sup> Torrance, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*, 174.

<sup>60</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 446.

<sup>61</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 446. Setting our minds on things that are above, entails putting to death whatever in us is “earthly” (Colossians 3:1-5).

<sup>62</sup> See Philip Ziegler, “Discipleship” in *Sanctified by Grace: A Theology of the Christian Life*, eds. Kent Eilers and Kyle C. Strobel (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 186.

feelings from God only serve to strengthen their entrenchment. As we allow the Spirit to shift our minds from their self-referencing, looping monologues toward a loving curiosity in Jesus who is present in, with, and among us, our internal world increasingly becomes an ongoing dialogue with the Father, Son, and Spirit. In grace and love, Jesus encounters us in the weed-filled garden of our souls and asks, "Where are you?," inviting us to tell the truth about ourselves — *to confess*. We will not risk such honest truth-telling unless we believe that Jesus is for us and present with us through his Spirit to meet us inside the darkness of our own delusions and walk us out. The work of the Spirit within us is to teach us to take sides with Jesus against the way we see in our isolated selves (John 14:15-17; John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).

Until we confess our untruth, we will not be able to hear Jesus' truth and way, nor will we be able to know the fullness of his life. But if we tell the truth about ourselves, he is faithful to meet us inside the darkness of our wearying yokes with the light of himself. Thus, prior to inquiring regarding the mindset of Christ ("What do you see, know, love, etc?"), we do well to confess what we see (or think we see), know (or believe we know), and love (or imagine we love). "Jesus, here is what 'I' am seeing; what do you want me to see?" In the dance of this dialogue, the personalizing Spirit does her<sup>63</sup> personalizing work, wooing us to bring our whole selves — shadows and all — into the light of Christ, and daring us to allow ourselves to be seen. Inside this face-to-face dialogue of love, as we see ourselves being seen, and know ourselves being known, we come to regard ourselves in a new light — the glory-light that shines upon us from the face of the Christ. As we consent to the Spirit's personalizing work, patiently ordering our disordered loves, unveiling and revealing, we discover ourselves becoming human the way that God in Christ is human. Our curved-in monologues are transformed into turned out dialogues through the authentic communion of confession and repentance. This is the deepest human freedom one can receive: to be in the humanizing presence of the Son of God, living in the love of God.

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<sup>63</sup> In this context, the choice of pronoun which seems most appropriate mirrors Jesus' in Luke 13:34, "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings."

### Trajectory #3: A Rule of Life

Torrance is under no illusions that human beings are merely brains on a stick. When he refers to the transformation of the mind, he includes the whole of a person — body, mind, and soul. “It is not with disembodied minds that we have to do here, but with the created unity of mind and body in which the human self is constituted.”<sup>64</sup> The renewing of the mind and the offering of the body to God are interrelated and mutually informing.

The great tragedy of the Christian church is how common it is for the mind and body and soul to be split off from each other. In some cases, the dichotomy is grossly obvious, as in the Sunday worshipper still recovering from the previous night’s hangover; but more often than not the contradiction is hidden — even from the awareness of the person themselves. Another Sunday worshipper seated beside her hangover pewmate may sing of the relentless love of God, all the while judging her friend and congratulating herself for purity and devotion. That same worshipper may view God as inherently disappointed in her and consequently inhabit a deeply anxious existence day by day. While surface appearances may suggest otherwise, it is highly likely that our anxious and judgmental worshipper knows less of the love of God *in their soul and body* than our hangover worshipper.<sup>65</sup>

Before we become the judges, judging the judges, we do well to recognize ourselves in both stories. Real, that is, *actual* transformation in Christ, is not an easy endeavor. Torrance himself was under no illusions that it would be:

Let us make no mistake about it: divine revelation conflicts sharply with the structure of our natural reason, with the secular patterns of thought that have already become established in our minds through the twist of our ingrained mental alienation from God. We cannot

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 446-7. Torrance leans heavily on Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV), “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [rational; reasonable; immaterial (*logiken*)] worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

<sup>65</sup> This seems to be the point of Jesus’ parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:10-14.

become true theologians without the agonising experience of profound change in the mental structure of our innermost being.<sup>66</sup>

The conversion or renewal of our minds which is the primary work of the Spirit is first and foremost a matter of identity. The thoughts we think, the emotions we feel, and the decisions we make are all determined and guided by who we think we are. This is not simply a matter of memorizing a list of “who I am in Christ.” Identity is much more than skin deep. Identity goes to the very core of our sense of self. For the “ingrained mental alienation” of our “secular patterns of thought” to be reformed, the communion we have as beloved children of the Father must be “pushed through”<sup>67</sup> the whole of our being — body, mind, and soul. Just because we may believe something does not mean we *know* it. This is the nature of our creatureliness, and Torrance’s *kata physin* epistemology anticipates and suggests a line of response.

Epistemology *kata physin* respects an object according to its nature. As human creatures who are embodied, our embodiment matters. Thus, if we are to indwell a different identity than that which the currents of our world would impose upon us, we will need practices and rhythms where such an “alien” identity can mature and blossom. Spiritual practices and rhythms of prayer focus attention and serve as containers within which love can grow and identity in Christ can be anchored in place and time. Without the discipline of a regular rhythm of intentional practices, we suffer mind-drift. We lose sight of who and whose we are and the seeds of the Spirit are easily cluttered and choked out by the weeds and thorns of the world.

While individual disciplines have value, if we are to respect the bodily nature of our creatureliness, more than a few disconnected spontaneous practices will be necessary. Since the invention of the clock, the artificiality of time has increasingly become the way we mark, and thereby define, our daily lives. If we want to change

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<sup>66</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 443. Torrance’s own life demonstrates that these statements are no mere words. In spite of, or perhaps *because of*, his education and scholarship, he never outgrew these most basic “Spiritual disciplines” of daily prayer and Bible reading which he learned as a child.

<sup>67</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 115-6.



the way time functionalizes our identity, we must interrupt it. The most ancient and effective way we do this is by way of a "Rule of life."<sup>68</sup> If we want to change the way lower appetites dominate our body and soul, alienating us from real love, we must commandeer them. The way we do this is also by a Rule of life.

A Rule interrupts time by breaking into our lives and setting something outside of time as the measurement of our days. A Rule serves as an anchor, holding us from drifting along with the currents of culture and our animal impulses. Spiritual practices function like anchor points throughout our days and weeks, holding us in a place of attentiveness and readiness before God. Like an anchor, we do not keep a Rule, the Rule keeps us.<sup>69</sup> Torrance recommends several core practices which could naturally be part of a Rule, both in his writings and by his example.

We know from Torrance's own testimony that daily prayer and reading of scripture was his lifelong practice, handed down to him through the modeling of his parents. In his writings he also highlights the importance of regular worship, meditation on scripture, and observing Sabbath. Above all, Torrance spoke of the importance of "unceasing prayer" and "repentant rethinking" as the means by which we offer ourselves daily to God and tune in to the mind of God incarnate in Jesus Christ.<sup>70</sup> By these kinds of concrete actions, which Torrance calls our "rational worship," we commandeer space and time by offering it and ourselves in it to Christ. This is how we become ourselves "healed, renewed, and sanctified in him."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> A Rule of life [Latin from *regula* meaning "rhythm, regularity of pattern, a recognizable standard"] dates back (at least) to Daniel in the Old Testament, as seen in his commitment to a regular practice of fixed-hour prayer. While Torrance did not specifically use this term, he clearly lived by a Rule and regularly recommended the same set of core Spiritual practices.

<sup>69</sup> Bonhoeffer offered this advice to a couple while officiating their wedding: "It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "A Wedding Sermon from a 1943 Prison Cell").

<sup>70</sup> See "The Reconciliation of Mind," in *Atonement*, 437–47. See also Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace*, 266–7.

<sup>71</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 447. All of this, if it is to stand a chance, must be done as part of a community. The currents of our culture are too strong; the conflictedness of our inner world is too confusing. We need the support of Christ's body.

Through the container of a Rule, all of life can become fertile ground for the Spirit. The rhythm of the Rule serves the life of a Christian the way a trellis serves a vine. The trellis does not bring about growth, but aids growth by lifting the vine up off the ground so it can flourish. Similarly, a Rule does not “make” growth happen, but serves to lift up our attentiveness to the presence of God in and among us.<sup>72</sup> By offering our attention and consent to God in certain times and places, the hope is that all times and places might become charged with an awareness of God in all things and all things in God. While certain activities should be considered essential, the truth is anything and everything becomes a Spiritual practice when we connect the gift to the Giver. Any activity can be done “with God” and so become another “unforced rhythm of grace.”<sup>73</sup>

Needless to say, Torrance has no interest in legalistic rules or piety for piety’s sake. Like any religious activity human beings put their hands to, Spiritual formation can be faked and become a kind of whitewashed tomb. Spiritual formation practices fail when they become disconnected from the Giver. Fixation on “gifts” and self-centered motivations for Spiritual practices miss the fundamental reality that, in God, ends and means are one. The only gift that matters is the Giver himself. It is far too easy (and common) for would-be disciples to take up Spiritual disciplines in a way that betrays and contradicts participation and communion and only entrenches the self-serving pathways which already exist. We can read words off the pages of a Bible but never gaze into the face of the Trinity looking back at us. We can pray to God and never contemplate the reality of our belovedness.

Since the end and means of Spiritual formation is communion, the only properly contrapuntal motive for Spiritual practices is love. The aim of Spiritual formation is not personal peace, an unworried mind, an unhurried life, or an uncluttered soul.... Spiritual formation, *formation by the Spirit through communion*

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<sup>72</sup> A participatory, Trinitarian understanding views Spiritual disciplines, not so much as exercises to be “practiced,” but activities in which we are *met and acted upon* by the Spirit who draws us into the life of Christ.

<sup>73</sup> Matthew 11:28 (The Message). For example, a slow walk where we notice the beauty around us through the eyes of the creative God....

*in Christ*, is teleologically for love, by love, in love.<sup>74</sup> This is the only final measurement that counts: to become love; to become like God himself; loving God, self, and others, as God loves us; to become in the world a taste of God's self-giving, co-suffering, radically forgiving love. This is the ultimate goal of the Spirit in us: that we would be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19). This is the beautiful vision of God's project of making human beings fully alive in the image of Christ. The humanization of the human race takes place when human beings like you and I receive the Giver as the gift, and so become like God himself, "freed to spontaneously love in freedom."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Learning to live consciously and faithfully "within the circle of the life of Christ." - Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 109.

<sup>75</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 66.