

# Participatio

Journal of the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship

Volume 10 (2022):  
The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience



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

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## **LIFE IN THE SPIRIT:**

### **Communion with the Vicarious Humanity of Christ**

**Christian D. Kettler**

**Professor Emeritus, Theology and Religion, Friends University**

kettler@friends.edu

**Abstract:** *Life in the Spirit is usually summarized as simply not "gratifying the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16, New Revised Standard Version) or a subjective, experiential "If we live by the Spirit, let us be guided by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). As important as those biblical aspects are, they need to be christologically grounded in the continual significance and reality of the humanity of Christ as the substitute and representative of our reality, what Thomas F. Torrance calls "the vicarious humanity of Christ." In this way, The Spirit is Christ continually meeting us in our weakness (Romans 8:26). Since Christ ascended to the Father (a significant part of the preaching on the Day of Pentecost – Acts 2:33), the Spirit has been poured out to connect us with his continual ministry (Hebrews 7:25), another major theme in Torrance's Christology. This has tremendous pastoral implications for our Christology today in a world of innocent suffering that often wonders if the "omnipotent" God is on our side as we suffer. The Spirit of Christ is this "belonging" of the "children of God" (Romans 8:9, 14).*

## Introduction

Jesus is the one Spirit-led believer. Can we believe that? Is that an affront to our own ideas of spirituality and religiosity, the project of the *homo religiosus*, the religious person? How does the Spirit who empowered Jesus, however, empower the church today? How does it do so in a way which continues the vicarious ministry of Christ? Is there a vicarious ministry of the Spirit?

The disciples were not able to heal the epileptic boy, Jesus said, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20)

How torturous this saying has been to us! "[I]f you have faith..." What an "if"! What happens when I *don't* have enough faith? Has Jesus cast me aside, then? Is he only interested in those whose faith "measures up" to his level of faith?

Perhaps faith is simply, as Ernest Becker says, our "offering to the life force," a wistful, poignant affirmation of life, simply because one has nothing to lose.<sup>1</sup> Is faith that barren, resigned to meaninglessness?

Jesus believes. My faith may be next to nothing. It may have been devastated by the cruelties of life. It may have been destroyed by my own bad choices. Yet Jesus still believes. The faithfulness of Jesus, Torrance says, "undergirds" my weak, devastated faith.<sup>2</sup> One has already believed and *still believes*. Thus, faith is not simply our part of the contract, what we do in response to grace. No, the faith of Jesus is an expression, a manifestation of *the faithfulness of God*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 285.

<sup>2</sup> T. F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 114.

<sup>3</sup> T. F. Torrance, "One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith," *The Expository Times* 68 (1956-57), 111-14, 221-22; T. F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church, II: The Ministry and Sacraments of the Gospel* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1959), 74-82.

In the New Testament, Jesus bestows the Spirit upon others (John 14:16-19, 26; 16:13-15; 1 John 3:24; 4:13), and even a couple citations seemingly identify Jesus and the Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45; 2 Corinthians 3:17).<sup>4</sup> The tendency is to see the Spirit as that which “aids” or “bridges” the gap between God and ourselves rather than, as Zizioulas puts it, “the person of the Trinity who actually realizes in history that which we call Christ, this absolutely relational entity, our Savior.”<sup>5</sup> The relational tone of Zizioulas is certainly welcome, but where is the basis in humanity for the Spirit if the vicarious *humanity* of Christ is not there? Zizioulas has been criticized for this absence before.<sup>6</sup> Should we say, Christ exists only pneumatologically, with Zizioulas?<sup>7</sup> Perhaps, but not without the ontological and human foundation in the vicarious humanity of Christ.

As Torrance puts it, some doctrines of the Spirit readily flounder with “our subjective states” or “confusing the Spirit with our spirits.”<sup>8</sup> The “objectivity” of being “face to face with Jesus” is lost. This is what the vicarious humanity of Christ repairs. This makes clear, yes, there is a ministry of the Spirit today, but it makes a difference that the Spirit’s ministry depends on the unique, historical ministry of the Incarnate Son, which continues today, even in the heavenlies.<sup>9</sup> There is no “kingdom of the Spirit,” nor an “Incarnation of the Spirit,” but a “Kingdom of Christ in and by the Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> It is only through the incarnate Son, the *eidos*, the “image” of God, Torrance contends, that God is known “to us creaturely human beings

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas N. Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 358.

<sup>5</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 110-11.

<sup>6</sup> Todd Speidell, *Fully Human in Christ: The Incarnation as the End of Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 91-92.

<sup>7</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 111.

<sup>8</sup> T. F. Torrance, “The Relevance of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit for Ecumenical Theology” in *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 235-36.

<sup>9</sup> T. F. Torrance, “Introduction” in *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke and Co., 1959), xcvi.

<sup>10</sup> T. F. Torrance, “The Foundation of the Church: Union with Christ through the Spirit,” *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 204-5.

within the conditions and structures of our earthly existence," since only he is both "homoousios with the Father" and "homoousios with us."<sup>11</sup> Athanasius can speak of the Son as the means by which we know the Spirit: "We are permitted to see in the Son the Spirit in whom we are enlightened."<sup>12</sup> There is "one grace," Athanasius adds, "from the Father which is perfected through the Son in the Holy Spirit."<sup>13</sup>

In the Son's vicarious humanity we see how crucial it is, in Torrance's words, to develop "the reconciliation of mind."<sup>14</sup> At the heart of the vicarious humanity of Christ is Paul's exhortation to present ourselves as "a living sacrifice," not to be "conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Romans 12:1-2). This means all of our humanity is taken captive by Christ, not just the "spiritual" or the "moral," but including how we think. This involves a check upon vacuous views of "spirit" that circulate periodically in cultures, even today.

Yet it is only by the Spirit we know that Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). Theology has often forgotten that. (I remember Torrance lecturing that there is no "logical connection" between the cross and forgiveness. But there is a "Holy Ghost" connection!<sup>15</sup> That is, as Barth puts it, this is not "the spirit of the true, the good, the beautiful, but as being ... the quite incomprehensible Holy Spirit who is striving with man's hostility in this battle and victory of grace."<sup>16</sup>) "The Son never encounters the Father," Hans Urs von Balthasar observes, "and the Father never

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<sup>11</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 203.

<sup>12</sup> Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion*, 1.19.2, in Athanasius and Didymus the Blind, *Works on the Spirit*, trans. Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion*, 1.14.6.

<sup>14</sup> T. F. Torrance, "The Reconciliation of Mind" in *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster and Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 437-447. Cf. T. F. Torrance, "The Epistemology of the Holy Spirit" in *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 165-92; *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order and Openness in Theology and Natural Science* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> T. F. Torrance, "The Grammar of Theology" lectures, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1981, Grace Communion International website, gci.org.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Barth, *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life*, trans. R. Birch Hoyle (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 20.



encounters the Son, except in the Holy Spirit."<sup>17</sup> So Jesus "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" when he began his great prayer to the Father, "I thank you, Father ..." (Luke 10:21).

At the heart of Christian faith is Jesus Christ. As the Council of Chalcedon puts it, he is Very God and Very Man. Barth comments on Chalcedon in this way: "As certainly as Jesus Christ is very God and also very man, it includes also the fact that there may be genuine obedience on the part of man: the obedience of man as his free act."<sup>18</sup> The faith and obedience of Jesus is the foundation of the faith and obedience of his followers who are led by his Spirit. This is a vicarious faith, on our behalf and in our place, a faith that meets us in our utter need.

While one must not identify Christ and the Spirit, one must also see their oneness (in a Chalcedonian sense: "not to be separated, but not to be confused"). As Athanasius points out, when we are enlightened by the Spirit, "it is Christ who in the Spirit enlightens us. For 'he was the true light' (John 1:9)."<sup>19</sup> But Athanasius also remembers the distinction in the Triune Persons: "So, again, while the Father is fountain, and the Son is called river, we are said to drink of the Spirit. For it is written that 'we have all been given to drink of one Spirit' (1 Corinthians 12:13)." Athanasius possesses a dynamic "Logos/Spirit" Christology which takes a distinct ministry of the Spirit towards humanity seriously: our participation by the Spirit: "For what the Word has by nature, ... in the Father, that he wishes to be given to us through the Spirit irrevocably."<sup>20</sup> In Cyprian's cry for the unity of the Church, he cites the oneness of Christ and the Spirit, quoting Ephesians 4:4: "There is one

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<sup>17</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory: Volume III: The Spirit of Truth*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 369.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (cited afterward as *CD*), eds. T. F. Torrance and G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956-1969) IV/2, 801.

<sup>19</sup> Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, 1.19.4, in *Athanasius*, ed. Khaled Anatolios (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 218.

<sup>20</sup> Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, Discourse III.25.25, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series* (cited afterward as *NPNF*), eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1887) 4, 407.

body and one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God."<sup>21</sup>

Torrance is skeptical of all that lessens the "objectivity" of God. The importance of an objective perfect human response in Christ's vicarious humanity reaffirms this. Such a conviction is suspicious of pneumatologies that originate with "our subjective states" or "evaporating the Spirit into immanent nature or confusing the Spirit with our spirit."<sup>22</sup> The alternative is, bluntly, becoming "face to face with Jesus." G. W. Bromiley questions the Christian East's refusal to accept the *filioque* addition to the creed ("and the Son") as "testif[ying] perhaps to an underlying impulse to separate the Holy Spirit and His work from Jesus Christ, to give to the Holy Spirit an autonomy in revelation and redemption, to achieve a Christianity of the 'spirit' without the corresponding embodiment of the 'flesh.'"<sup>23</sup> Of course, Bromiley adds, church history is replete with other examples in the West, from Puritans to Quakers, of when that has been done. That "fleshly" aspect is seen deeply in the scriptural narrative of Jesus, beginning with Christ being born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit. "To deny the Virgin Birth is to separate between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit," indeed the whole Trinity, according to Bromiley.<sup>24</sup> The one sent by the Father was conceived by the Spirit, but was known first of all in the flesh of his humanity as the incarnate Son.

Such a Christology which is open to the Spirit is a Christology which Karl Barth repeatedly called a Christology of "the *living* Jesus Christ" (emphasis mine).<sup>25</sup> "The truth is identical with the *living* Jesus Christ, the true Witness. It is identical with the *personal* work ... It is identical ... with the promise of the Spirit..."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cyprian, "On the Unity of the Church," *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (cited afterward as *ANF*), eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) 5.1.4, 422.

<sup>22</sup> T. F. Torrance, "The Relevance of the Doctrine of the Spirit for Ecumenical Theology" in *Theology in Reconstruction*, 235.

<sup>23</sup> G. W. Bromiley, "The Spirit of Christ" in *Essays in Christology for Karl Barth*, ed. T. H. L. Parker (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 135.

<sup>24</sup> Bromiley, "The Spirit of Christ," 137.

<sup>25</sup> Barth, *CD* IV/3.1, 475, *passim*.

<sup>26</sup> Barth, *CD* IV/3.1, 475.

The vicarious humanity is essential in understanding the importance of the Holy Spirit who is “mediated by Christ.”<sup>27</sup> Often cited is John 20:21, where the resurrected Jesus repeats his continuity with the Father’s mission (cf. John 17:18: “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”), with the additional promise (or imperative?): “Receive the Holy Spirit.” At least one can see the direct connection between Christ and the Spirit. The danger across the centuries of Christian history is for doctrines of an unmediated Spirit to capture the fancy of the church. The vicarious nature of the Christ who gives his Spirit to his people means, for Torrance, “only God can give God.” Only he is able to give himself, particularly in human nature, in vicarious *humanity*, sharing in who we are. This involves partaking of the Spirit of God, becoming the Spirit-led believer of the Gospels. Although the Spirit is always involved in creation (Genesis 1:1-2), this is a much more intimate involvement because of the Incarnation, Torrance avows, and what happens in human nature through Jesus’ being born of the Virgin Mary, his baptism, his life in unity with the Father, and his offering himself as Lamb and Priest for our salvation. In the entirety of his humanity, he is “both the God who gives and the Man who receives in One Person.”<sup>28</sup> As “the Man who receives” this applies “above all to the gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>29</sup>

But in following the dynamic of Paul in Romans 8, Torrance emphasizes the significance of the Holy Spirit, who “mediates Christ to us.”<sup>30</sup> The rampaging Spirit of the Old Testament has been “adapted and accustomed” to the flesh of Jesus, “not as isolated and naked Spirit, but as Spirit charged with all the experience of Jesus as he shared to fill our mortal nature and weakness ....”<sup>31</sup> But Christ does not leave us. He is in “continual intercession” as our “High Priest,” having taken up “the gloried Humanity of Christ.” Therefore, the Spirit’s vicarious work “answers” to “the twofold work of the Son,” both “manward” and “Godward,” the “Godward” being the

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<sup>27</sup> T. F. Torrance, “Come, Creator Spirit, for the Renewal of Worship and Witness” in *Theology in Reconstruction*, 245-46.

<sup>28</sup> Torrance, “Come, Creator Spirit,” 245.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

vicarious humanity of Christ.<sup>32</sup> The Spirit does not work apart from “answering” the vicarious humanity of Christ. So there should be no thought of the Spirit “replacing” Christ. We can now be “partakers” in the Son’s worship, through the Spirit.<sup>33</sup> The Spirit’s aim is in “uniting us to the response and obedience and faith and prayer of Jesus.”<sup>34</sup> In fact, one should speak of the Spirit as the one who “hides himself” and only speaks of the Son, who was the one who was incarnate.<sup>35</sup>

Jesus in the Fourth Gospel remarkably paints the picture of the “rivers of living water” that will flow “[o]ut of the believer’s heart” when the Spirit is given (John 7:38-39). Paul can also say powerfully to the Romans, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). He can also write to the church at Corinth of the dependence on the Spirit for even the Christian’s confession of the lordship of Jesus: “... no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

### **The Holy Spirit: Grace, Union with Christ, Participation in the Spirit, and Intercession**

The Holy Spirit in fact is involved in God’s initiative of grace, says Luther in his Small Catechism: “I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel ....”<sup>36</sup> For Calvin, the Holy Spirit is at the heart of his doctrine of union with Christ, the Spirit who is “the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.”<sup>37</sup> Without union with Christ through the Spirit, “Christ remains outside of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>36</sup> Luther’s Small Catechism, Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed, *Creeds of the Churches*, ed. John H. Leith (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox, 1963), 116. Cf. Barth, *CD IV/3.2*, 490-91, 495, 503-5.

<sup>37</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 edition, 3.1.1.

us.” Calvin speaks of “the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.”<sup>38</sup> “The testimony of the Spirit ... seals the cleansing and sacrifice of Christ.”<sup>39</sup> “Our souls are cleansed by the secret watering of the Spirit.”<sup>40</sup> Torrance is distinctive in his stress on the Incarnation as the *one* union with Christ and humanity and his criticism of subsequent Reformed theology’s teaching on a subsequent union: There is “only one union with Christ, that He has wrought out with us in His birth and life and death and resurrection and in which He gives us to share through the gift of His Spirit.”<sup>41</sup> Notice the emphasis Torrance puts on the connection between union with Christ and the gift of the Spirit. As Ray Anderson comments, 2 Corinthians 5:19 teaches that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,” but Romans 8 speaks of the work of the Spirit in redemption (8:23).<sup>42</sup> Torrance’s contention is that we understand that we are not saved by our act of believing but by “the vicarious faith of Christ ... It is only on this basis that we are really free to believe and have faith in Christ without any ulterior motive of using faith to secure our salvation.”<sup>43</sup> This is the very *foundation* for our belief, rather than preempting our belief, as some critics think.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the Torrance brothers speak of union with Christ and the vicarious humanity of Christ as “twin doctrines,” which lead to our participation in Christ through the Spirit.<sup>45</sup> For as Barth simply

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Torrance, “Introduction” in *The School of Faith*, cvii.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Ray S. Anderson, “God and the Prodigal Son” in *Trinitarian Conversations, Volume 1: Interviews with Ten Theologians* (Glendora, CA: Grace Communion International, 2013), 12. Anderson attributes this thought to Karl Barth.

<sup>43</sup> Torrance, “Introduction” in *The School of Faith*, cix.

<sup>44</sup> See Donald MacLeod, *Jesus is Lord: Christology. Yesterday and Today* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2000), 134. See also the critique in Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of T. F. Torrance* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 77.

<sup>45</sup> James B. Torrance, “Christ in Our Place” in Thomas F. Torrance, James B. Torrance, and David W. Torrance, *A Passion for Christ: The Vision That Ignites Ministry*, eds. Gerrit Dawson and Jock Stein (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press and Lenoir: PLC Publications, 1999), 51.

puts it, being "in Christ" means "where Christ is" and "belonging" to him.<sup>46</sup> This is where Christ has union with the entire human being, body and soul, as emphasized by the vicarious humanity, not just death of Christ. This has been neglected by some Reformed divines' emphasis simply on our "spiritual" nature.<sup>47</sup>

The importance, if not priority, of the Spirit is highlighted in Matthew 12:32: "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." Whatever is the interpretation of the troublesome "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," if Jesus means "the Son of Man" to be one of his titles, it does bring up a possible superseding of the Spirit over the Son (at least economically), or at least his ministry as "the Son of Man." This may be academic if one takes into account that Jesus is the One Spirit-led Believer in whom all the works of the Spirit begin and in whom all other works of the Spirit participate.

Here is the place in Torrance's thought for the significance of *participation* through the Spirit. What Christ has done for us has been done in his humanity, in identification with ours through the Holy Spirit. Torrance is careful to include the Holy Spirit in calling the Incarnation the "controlling and shaping principle ... a knowledge mediated through the Son which we may have only through the activity of the Holy Spirit and as in the Spirit we participate in the Son and through him in God."<sup>48</sup> Participation is participation in God's own life, as sons and daughters of God, or *theosis*.<sup>49</sup> This is what happens in the Godward movement of the vicarious humanity of Christ, as we participate in the Spirit in the risen and ascended Christ's humanity, finding our true center in God.

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<sup>46</sup> Barth, *CD IV/3.2*, 594.

<sup>47</sup> Torrance, "Introduction" in *The School of Faith*, cvi-cvii.

<sup>48</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 63-64.

<sup>49</sup> Torrance, "Come, Creator Spirit," 243. Cf. Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*; T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 243; T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 223, 234; T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 151.

Here also we find participation by the Spirit as intertwined with faith.<sup>50</sup> Faith, of course, as many have increasingly realized in recent years, should be first understood as the faith *of Jesus*.<sup>51</sup>

The One who asks his disciples for more faith is the same One who prays for us (John 17:6-26). His prayers, as Campbell says, are the highest expression of his trust in the Father.<sup>52</sup> Jesus is the one who boldly prays in "the knowledge of the Father's will and confidence in His love." He *intercedes* for those who do not have enough faith. That is what is happening in Matthew 17:20 with the disciples. What is often only seen as a criticism of the disciples, an exhortation for them to "have more faith," is actually *an act of intercession* on the part of Jesus. Intercession. Can this be a pointer towards the vicarious work of Christ today?

Intercession is a peculiar form of vicarious life. This was true for the relationship between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his friend Eberhard Bethge when the former was in prison. So Bonhoeffer can write to Bethge,

I have the feeling that to a certain degree you also see things with my eyes, just as I see things here with yours. We thus experience our different fates for each other in a kind of *vicarious way*.<sup>53</sup>

Is this an entrée into the vicarious work of the Spirit, "because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27)? Is this kind of vicarious intercession a way we participate in the work of the Spirit for each other? Our inability, our need to depend upon another, enables the Spirit to work in our lives.

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<sup>50</sup> Frank D. Macchia, *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 221.

<sup>51</sup> Macchia, *Justified in the Spirit*, 240; Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 141-62; *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, Theological Studies*, eds. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle (Milton Keynes: Paternoster and Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 176.

<sup>53</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 8, trans. Isabel Best, Lisa E. Dahill, Reinhard Krauss, and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 191 (emphasis mine).

Lack of knowledge (“we do not know how to pray as we ought”) as well as moral inability (“for I do not do the good I want”) are both problems for us.

## **The Vicarious Humanity of Christ, the Spirit-Led Believer**

The concern of the vicarious humanity of Christ is that there is no doctrine or experience of the Holy Spirit which has any ground apart from the humanity of Christ. It is at this point that the emphasis the vicarious humanity of Christ puts on the faith of Jesus finds harmony in those adherents of “Spirit Christology” who find many traditional Christologies lacking in attention to the earthly life of Jesus.<sup>54</sup> The vicarious humanity of Christ reminds us we must not do that, for our faith and obedience is based on the faith and obedience of Jesus. Indeed, although there is a long history (particularly in the Reformed tradition) of the place of inner testimony of the Holy Spirit in the knowledge of God, it has famously been critiqued by D. F. Strauss as the “Achilles’ heel” of Protestantism as ultimately too subjective.<sup>55</sup> Does not *the faith of Jesus* provide a grounding for the knowledge of God through the Holy Spirit that takes it away from our subjective experiences and places it on Jesus, the Spirit-led Believer, who believes on our behalf and in our place vicariously, yet avoids the problem of some Spirit Christologies which can lead to Adoptionism or Unitarianism?<sup>56</sup>

Life in the Spirit, then, is not something superior to, or absent from, the presence of the same Jesus Christ who walked the sands of Galilee. The Spirit is only superior in the sense of eschatological fulfillment and universality (Acts 2:17). But the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9), that will glorify the Son (John 16:14).

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<sup>54</sup> See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 73-78.

<sup>55</sup> D. F. Strauss, *Die chr. Glaubenslehre*, vol. 1, 1840, 136, cited by Barth, *CD I/2*, 537.

<sup>56</sup> For examples of orthodox, trinitarian Spirit Christologies see Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1996); Myk Habets, *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010); and *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, ed. Myk Habets (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).



We cannot have Pentecost without Christ, Ray Anderson argues: "Pentecost is not a replacement for Jesus Christ, but always the manifestation of Jesus Christ through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit."<sup>57</sup> We would contend that this is made even stronger by the recognition that this is Christ in his vicarious humanity, who does not leave us alone, but also does not allow us to let the entirety of our humanity to be untouched. As the fathers frequently said, "The unassumed is the unhealed."<sup>58</sup>

It is right, then, to recognize a "Spirit Christology" that begins with Christ's being born of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit then descends upon him "like a dove" at his baptism (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22). "Full of the Holy Spirit," Jesus is led into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1). He then fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1 as Jesus unrolls the scroll in the synagogue and reads, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ..." (Luke 4:18). This manifests "the original source of his obedience as issuing out of the filial love of the Son for the Father and the Father for the Son," the Spirit being, in the Augustinian sense, the "bond" of love between the eternal Son and the eternal Father.<sup>59</sup>

Yet the Spirit is more than just the continuation of the historical Jesus and a link to him so we as the "church" can celebrate Jesus as an "Abraham Lincoln Club" honors Abraham Lincoln. Jesus is no mere "example" in the past for the church to remember fondly and mimic. No, there is also an indwelling of the Spirit in the church that is a power and presence which is the source of the church's life and ministry.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline: A Practical Theology for an Empowered Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 40.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ep.* 101, cited by Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 164; Gregory of Nyssa, *Adv. Apol.*, cited by Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 162; Athanasius, *Con. Ar.*, cited by Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 161. See the exhaustive study by E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline*, 39.

<sup>60</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 111.

Jesus may have been “led” by the Spirit and “baptized” by the Spirit as an example for us, but also to emphasize a genuine humanity lived in our place. After his baptism, the Holy Spirit was present in all of his actions, the church father Basil observes.<sup>61</sup> His baptism is the one baptism in which all of our baptisms participate (T. F. Torrance).<sup>62</sup> Torrance’s place for the human nature of Christ in the vicarious humanity of Christ is not “merely instrumental” in Torrance’s thought, as some have claimed.<sup>63</sup> The Son who is led by the Spirit is the Son who actually believes and obeys in our place and on our behalf. He has a genuine relationship with the Father in the Spirit. This hardly means that “Christ’s human experience” is “a considerable oversight” given the place of the vicarious life, faith, and obedience of Jesus in Torrance’s thought.<sup>64</sup> The vicarious humanity of Christ provides a critique of Spirit Christologies that begin dualistically with religious experience and “historical Jesus” research and thus suffer the “tunnel vision” inadequacy of the modern preoccupation with Christologies “from below.”

### **Life in the Spirit and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ**

Indeed, there is a danger of speaking of the spiritual life, of the life in the Spirit as a “Presence without form,” a danger of separating the Spirit from Christ.<sup>65</sup> As Barth comments, “the Holy Spirit is not identical with the human spirit, but He meets it.”<sup>66</sup> While recognizing the deity in which all three persons share, one must also recognize that it is only the Son who became incarnate, who took upon himself human flesh, human form. The vicarious humanity of Christ reminds us of this.

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<sup>61</sup> Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 16.39 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980). Cf. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., *Receiver, Bearer and Giver of God’s Spirit: Jesus’ Life in the Spirit as a Lens for Theology and Life* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 225.

<sup>62</sup> T. F. Torrance, “The One Baptism Common to Christ and the Church” in *Theology in Reconciliation*, 82-105.

<sup>63</sup> Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 71.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 196; See also Myk Habets, “Spirit Christology: Seeing in Stereo,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (2003), 199-235; Myk Habets, *The Anointed Son*.

<sup>65</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 227.

<sup>66</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 140.

Christ must continually take our place, not just be our representative, as in some theories of the atonement. Forensic views limit substitution to one moment of Christ paying the penalty for our sins on Calvary. Moral example views disallow Christ from taking our place in every aspect of our humanity. The vicarious humanity of Christ, by contrast, digs deep into the totality of our humanity with the totality of Christ's humanity so that when we act in the world, the Spirit of Christ is his Spirit of concrete love, not just "virtue signaling," but a love that concretely meets needs. "Disembodied love," says Anderson, "is a state of mind, and does not exist at all."<sup>67</sup> "Disembodied" is, unfortunately, how many today would define "spiritual," so goes with how they define the life of the Spirit.

But one must remember that Jesus just remains an historical figure without the Holy Spirit. In this way we may even say that it is the vicarious humanity of Christ that also needs the Holy Spirit: the vicarious humanity as, in Paul's term, the "Last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45) who is "a life-giving spirit."<sup>68</sup> James D. G. Dunn sees the anointing of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism as biblical grounds for Jesus as the representative of Israel, as, indeed, the new Adam.<sup>69</sup> Zizioulas can even say, Christ's "corporate personality" is "impossible to conceive without Pneumatology."<sup>70</sup>

Still, problems can arise when the Spirit is seen as the culmination of God's work, and Christ as taking second place. Leonardo Boff presents four stages of God's work: first, Mary, second, Christ, third, human and church community and, fourth, "everything comes from the Spirit."<sup>71</sup> The vicarious humanity of Christ is a critique of such a Hegelian move. But what becomes of Jesus Christ in such a

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<sup>67</sup> Anderson, *Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God*, 227.

<sup>68</sup> Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 130.

<sup>69</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 29.

<sup>70</sup> Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 29.

<sup>71</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, trans. Philip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY; Orbis Press, 1988), 22-23. See 17: "The Trinity is not revealed as a doctrine but as a practice: in the deeds and words of Jesus and in the action of the Holy Spirit in the world in the world and in people." This is an unfortunate example of what Torrance would call dualistic thinking. See also the critique of Boff in Christian D. Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 25-39.

theology? The vicarious humanity of Christ calls a halt to that which would take the place of Christ in the world, and in our lives, even life in the Spirit. Although the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can speak in an Irenaean way of the Father sending both his Word and his Breath, this is their “joint mission,” distinct only in that the Son is “seen” and the Spirit “reveals” him.<sup>72</sup> Is it helpful to speak of God’s work in a trinitarian way, as the Father’s “two hands,” the Word (or Son) and the Spirit, as Irenaeus suggests?<sup>73</sup> This is very popular in contemporary theology, as it seems to give attention to a “Word/Spirit” theology, taking each into account. While this suggests a strong trinitarian form as well, it also is strongly monarchical and tends to separate the Son from the Spirit. Also, as David Coffey points out concerning the “two hands,” “though true,” the separation of Christ from the Spirit severs the Spirit from the priority of the mission of the incarnate Son.<sup>74</sup> Torrance sounds a welcome alarm:

The operation of the Spirit is never merely instrumental in the hands of God – that is the danger in the old patristic image. He is God Himself personally present in this way, distinct from His Person as Father and distinct from His Person as Son, and yet as proceeding personally from the person of the Father and the person of the Son in the unity of the One God, and in the indivisible operations of the Trinity.<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps one can here make a modest proposal: Instead of a “Logos-centered” or “Spirit-centered” Christology, we see a “double movement” of the Incarnation itself, found in the *katabasis/anabasis* of the history of worship (proclamation then sacrament), a reflection of the deity and humanity of Christ, as reflected in a “Word/Spirit” theology. Many have suggested this, but without the important middle term of the vicarious humanity of Christ, who goes deeply into the

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<sup>72</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). par. 689.

<sup>73</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF, 4.20.1. See also Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 16-17.

<sup>74</sup> David Coffey, “The Method of Third Article Theology” in *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics*, ed. Myk Habets (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 24.

<sup>75</sup> Torrance, “Introduction” in *The School of Faith*, xcvi.

ontological recesses of our humanity in the downward, humanward first movement (representation), and then believes, obeys, worships, serves, loves, in our place, in the second movement, the upward, Godward movement, in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>76</sup> This does not mean that the Word or Spirit are absent in the other movements, in a kind of Nestorianism, but that the first movement is primarily Word and the second primarily Spirit, yet still indivisible and united through the vicarious humanity of Christ. Yet we would hope to avoid the temptation of many advocates of Irenaeus' "two hands" of the Father, the Word and the Spirit, to end with their being separate from each other, by always being reminded that the foundation of the Spirit on earth is the vicarious humanity of Christ. A "Word/Spirit" Christology centers on the living Christ himself, as Barth likes to say, which the vicarious humanity of Christ accentuates in a particular way, so that the apostolic *kerygma* is never proclaimed apart from the living Christ himself, as Torrance emphasizes. Christ proclaims himself as Word in the personal power of the Spirit, "making his work effective."<sup>77</sup> So Calvin can speak of Christ addressing the whole person, "without" (the Word) and "within" (the Spirit), for the end "to contemplate God's face" (remarkable for the iconoclastic Calvin!).<sup>78</sup> This has great implications for theological anthropology, as Torrance perceives. In *The Mediation of Christ* and other places he will speak of "the personalizing and actualizing activity of Christ."<sup>79</sup> As Gary Deddo points out, in other writings, Torrance connects Christ with the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God harmonizing with the humanity of the Son which "perfects/sanctifies our personhood, for by the Spirit

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<sup>76</sup> See also Yves Congar, *The Word and Spirit*, trans. David Smith (London: Geoffrey Chapman and San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986); Word and Spirit in Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.9.3., 2.5.3.

<sup>77</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Atonement*, 322-23.

<sup>78</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.5.5, 1.9.3.

<sup>79</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, second edition (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992), 67-69; Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons*, 160-61.

we are given a share in the Son's perfected and so personalized human nature."<sup>80</sup> Do we have participation and *theosis* fulfilled here?

Much of ethical exhortation is built upon the possibilities of our own strength, the imperative of a good will (Kant), and therefore is a slap in the face to those who are weak. This assumes that the gospel is for the righteous, not for the sinner, for the one who is well, not for the one who is ill (Luke 5:31, 32). Anderson names such living as "the kenotic way of life," from the word *kenos*, Greek for "empty," as is found in Philippians 2:7, in which Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave ...." Such is found to be the correct form of life in the Spirit, a "religious" life of "humility." But such a life, Anderson contends, is powerfully devoted to self-existence. This is despite how Bonhoeffer defines the church: "The church is the church only when it is there for others." So it immediately follows: "As a first step it must give away all its property to those in need."<sup>81</sup> But, in fact, the church would be losing its concrete existence in the world, its "lived transcendence," as Anderson argues against Bonhoeffer, that is, not being a reflection of continuing to participate in the life and ministry of the incarnate Christ. Anderson's view would be critical of George Hendry: "The evangelical-Protestant understanding of the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Church," George Hendry observes, is determined primarily by its concern for the integrity of the gospel."<sup>82</sup> Concern for "integrity" above all is a mark of "the kenotic way of life," Anderson believes, but not what Jesus expressed in creating what we might call "the kenotic community."

In contrast to "the kenotic way of life" is "the kenotic community," from Ray Anderson's thought, which, mirroring the incarnate Christ, is marked, not by the persons it renounces, but by the persons it receives.<sup>83</sup> Such character reflects who Jesus really is, that in "emptying" himself, he is not giving away his divinity, but

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<sup>80</sup> Gary W. Deddo, "The Holy Spirit in T. F. Torrance's Theology" in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 96; T. F. Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 188-89; Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 230-31.

<sup>81</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 503.

<sup>82</sup> George Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1957), 63.

<sup>83</sup> Anderson, *Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God*, 235.

this is “actually a quality of life intrinsic to the relation of Father and Son which is exemplified by the Son’s human obedience even unto death.”<sup>84</sup> The Holy Spirit, now “accustomed” (Irenaeus) to the humanity of Christ, “through intimate union of the Son with humanity, becomes one with the *kenotic* form as explicated by the Son in this humanity and thus creates a kenotic community.”<sup>85</sup> This is seen often in Jesus’ sitting down with the disreputable of society: “sinners” and “tax collectors” (Mark 2:15). Jesus is creating his *first community* here, not the church, but *the kenotic community*. This community is not based on a moral “principle,” but on the “intra-divine” community between the Father and the Son.<sup>86</sup> So the kenotic community means that life in the Spirit is an end in itself, a picture of communion, not upholding a moral principle to demonstrate one’s righteousness.<sup>87</sup>

Life in the Spirit can easily be substituted for a religious-led life of “emptying” for the sake of self-centeredness, what Anderson calls “the kenotic way of life.” The vicarious humanity of Christ provides the foundation in Christology and soteriology to represent us and take our place in a radical sense in order to create what Anderson calls “the kenotic community,” a community not self-centered, but Christ-centered (Philippians 2:1-10).

### **Ministry as the Continuing Spirit-Led “Ek-static” Ministry of the Vicarious Humanity of Christ**

All ministry must be Spirit-led. But we do not own ministries apart from Christ. There is one ministry, and that is Christ’s.<sup>88</sup> But even Jesus speaks of the Father sending him into the world as the paradigm of Jesus’ followers’ ministry in the world (“As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” - John 17:18). When the post-resurrection Jesus appears to the disciples, what is the message he first gives to them? “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 231-32.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>88</sup> Anderson, “Ministry as Theological Discovery” in *The Soul of Ministry*, 3-16.

20:21). What follows immediately is remarkable: The account says “he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). The Spirit is integrally connected with the resurrected Jesus. Acts tells us the final “instructions” of the ascending Lord were to “be my witnesses” (Acts 1:9), a theme mightily taken up by Karl Barth in *Church Dogmatics* IV/3 in terms of the overall subject of “Jesus Christ, The True Witness” (The Vicarious Humanity of Christ!). He is always the One who witnesses in the Spirit. This witness is even for the publicans and sinners.<sup>89</sup> It takes on their humanity, as judgment comes in the form of grace. Otherwise, the Spirit comes as just the raw power of deity, as we sometimes see in the Old Testament, or in many religious or philosophical concepts of “Spirit.”

The vicarious humanity of Christ must be recognized if concrete form is to be given to the Spirit in the kind of humanity that the Son both represents and takes the place of. So Anderson can say, with eyes on genuine Christian ministry, “When the Holy Spirit assumes the historical existence of the other man as the form of Christ for me, a cripple is no less real than a whole person.”<sup>90</sup> With “the kenotic community” Jesus sits with outsiders before he asks for a call to discipleship. There are no conditions here. Jesus is providing himself the appropriate human response on which all other human responses will be based, “so that the weakest of human flesh *already* possesses a place of participation, and then through the Holy Spirit who takes each person’s actual life into fellowship with Christ.”<sup>91</sup> This is a dynamic way of speaking of the relation of Christ and the Spirit in the Eucharist as “presence as absence,” Ray Anderson suggests, building upon John Zizioulas.<sup>92</sup> This is the Christ of the Incarnation, of Word (from God to us, a downward arrow, if you will), and Spirit (from us to God). The vicarious humanity of Christ is based on the bottom of that downwardness, to provide a foundation in the humanity of Christ for

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<sup>89</sup> Barth, *CD* IV/3.2, 587-88.

<sup>90</sup> Anderson, *Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God*, 234.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>92</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982, 177; John D. Zizioulas, “Human Capacity and Incapacity” in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 28 (1975), 420; reprinted in *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2006, 206-49 and as *The Meaning of Being Human* (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2021).



a human response filled with the Holy Spirit, in the church, for the world. These two movements in the world, for Anderson, are marks of “visibility for the transcendence of God.”<sup>93</sup> The vicarious humanity of Christ is involved in both movements.

What Anderson speaks of as “the ek-static community,” the second movement, the community of *ekstasis*, that “stands out” from itself, can very well be the community of worship, the community of the “secret discipline” of the early church, of worship, as Bonhoeffer suggests.<sup>94</sup> Anderson disagrees, and believes the kenotic community becomes the ek-static community in being there for not just the world, our earth, but the cosmos!<sup>95</sup> Our position is more asymmetrical, building upon Bonhoeffer, based on the relationship between the Son and the Spirit. They are one substance or essence, as the *homoousion* teaches. But they are still distinct; so also the relationship between the deity and humanity of Christ. And so also the kenotic community, of both Christians and non-Christians, out of which comes those who respond to the call to follow Jesus, the church, which is the worshiping and ministering body. But the church should never forget that it is still a part of the result of that “downward movement” of grace that still exists, the kenotic community. In true Chalcedonian fashion, the Word and the Spirit are not to be “confused,” but also not to be “divided.” They reflect the one Jesus Christ, the one Incarnation. As Anderson stresses, “Because Word and Spirit can never be separated, the kenotic community is at the same time the ek-static community.”<sup>96</sup> Again, this is not to deny any *distinction*, as guided by Chalcedonian thinking. The ek-static community reveals our *incapacity* for community, which the Spirit reveals as grace. The kenotic community does not possess the distinction from the world that the ek-static community does. In contrast with Christ is our psychological problem, according to Ernest Becker, of dealing with the fears of life and death through what Freud called “transference,” transferring our values on a larger than

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<sup>93</sup> Anderson, *Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God*, 235.

<sup>94</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 365, 373.

<sup>95</sup> Anderson, *Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God*, 246.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 250. See also Zizioulas, “Human Capacity and Human Incapacity.”

life hero, such as an athletic or political hero.<sup>97</sup> They can do what we cannot. In a way, this is a “reverse” vicarious humanity of Christ! That is what weakness, “incapacity,” if you will, brings out, in our attempt to deny our very genuine weakness, something only the power of the Spirit of the vicarious humanity of Christ can do.

The ek-static community, then, is the community of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of the vicarious humanity of Christ. As Torrance puts it, “indwelling” is made possible only through Jesus Christ “the one Mediator.”<sup>98</sup> Through his “atoning exchange ... the Holiness of God is brought to bear upon the ontological roots of our sinful being” and he “made himself the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit ... and now mediates him to us in the fulness of his divine presence and power.”<sup>99</sup>

### **The Holy Spirit as the Intercessory Power “Echoing” the Vicarious Humanity of Christ**

The Holy Spirit is, as is well-known, a power, the power of the wind of Pentecost, enabling the lonely, weakened disciples in the upper room to bear witness to the risen Jesus. But what kind of power is the Spirit? Power in itself can be oppressive, exploitative, and demonic. As Barth reminds us, Hitler could easily speak of God as “the Almighty,” for he, too, worshiped Power, with devastating consequences for humanity.<sup>100</sup> Anderson argues convincingly that original sin is based, not on the desire for self-fulfillment and pleasure, but on the will to power, to be able to control how one gains that fulfillment, regardless of whom it hurts.<sup>101</sup> Power is not a neutral value.

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<sup>97</sup> Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 173.

<sup>98</sup> T. F. Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition,” *Modern Theology* 4:4 (July, 1988), 320-21.

<sup>99</sup> Torrance, “The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition,” 320-21.

<sup>100</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 48.

<sup>101</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *Self-Care: A Theology of Personal Empowerment and Spiritual Healing* (Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint, 1995), 101-2.

The power of the Spirit is the power of *intercession*, a *vicarious* power. Paul makes this plain in Romans 8: "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (8:9); "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (8:11); and most of all, notice 8:26-27 (emphases mine):

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our *weakness*; for we do not know how to pray as we ought; but that very Spirit *intercedes* with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit *intercedes* for the saints according to the will of God.

Notice the connection between the Spirit and our weakness. What seems at first to be our weakness, our powerlessness, which can give way to the desire for omnipotence, is actually the context for the Spirit's intercession.<sup>102</sup> As Torrance stresses, "that Spirit of intercession echoes the intercession of Christ, is poured out upon his church so that the church become one body with Christ is given to *echo* [emphasis mine] in its prayers the intercession of Christ himself."<sup>103</sup> Note Torrance's use of the word "echo" in this collection of his Dogmatics lectures. This relation between the Spirit and Christ can also be found in his 1959 writing, *The School of Faith*: "Advocate" and "Intercessor" can be applied to be Christ and the Spirit, as the Spirit "applied" the work of Christ and "echoed [emphasis mine] in our invocation to God, because through the Spirit, Christ dwells in us and we in Him in a new relation of being."<sup>104</sup> Thus, it is right, with Torrance, and against George Hunsinger and Dick O. Eugenio, to speak of Christ Jesus as "the One Mediator between God and humankind ... himself human" (1 Timothy 2:5) and not of a

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<sup>102</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 493.

<sup>103</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster and Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 136.

<sup>104</sup> Torrance, "Introduction" in the *School of Faith*, cv-cvi.

“mediation of the Spirit” apart from that which “echoes” Christ (Romans 8).<sup>105</sup> The vicarious humanity of Christ maintains that. The ministry of Christ continues through the Spirit: even as the heavenly Christ who poured out the Spirit (Acts 2:33) “always lives to make intercession” (Hebrews 7:25), so also “that Spirit ... continues to echo in our stammering prayers on earth the compassionate intercession, in the sympathetic intervention of Christ.”<sup>106</sup> So Paul can say in Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Here is “the grand paradox,” according to Hawthorne.<sup>107</sup> “The secret of Paul’s independence was his dependence upon Another” (cf. Ephesians 6:10; 1 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 2:1; 4:17). The basis for this “independence, yet dependence” is the vicarious humanity of Christ. Torrance calls our attention to the *vicarious* work of the Spirit in this passage, doing for us what we are unable to do in our weakness.<sup>108</sup> The vicarious humanity of Christ, in fact, is the foundation for the work of the Spirit. And the work of the Spirit is the continuing reality of the vicarious humanity of Christ. Listen to Torrance: Paul uses

the very terms used to speak of the vicarious humanity of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit the heavenly advocacy and intercession of Christ our great High Priest are made *to echo inaudibly* [emphasis mine] within us, so that our praying and worshipping of God in the Spirit are upheld and made effective by him through a relation of God to himself.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 12; George Hunsinger, “The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 179; Dick O. Eugenio, *Communion with the Triune God: The Trinitarian Soteriology of T. F. Torrance* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 145.

<sup>106</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 137.

<sup>107</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians: Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 201.

<sup>108</sup> Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 117.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

At one point, Torrance can speak of knowledge of the Spirit as “mediated and actualized” through the “presence and activity” of the Spirit.”<sup>110</sup> It is Christ who “mediates the Spirit to us through himself.”<sup>111</sup> Jesus Christ, the Spirit-led Believer, enables our receiving of the Spirit because he has received the Spirit. This is a “vicarious receiving of the Spirit by Christ himself,” in which we can share and participate. That indwelling of the Holy Spirit which exists in the Holy Trinity eternally, that was involved with the Virgin Birth, the baptism, and the ministry of Jesus, now lifts us up to participation in God’s life, to be a “partaker in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4); this is the doctrine of *theosis*, the fruit of union and communion with God.<sup>112</sup> This is the Spirit, not as offering another, superior revelation or reconciliation, but offering us “participation in the vicarious and intercessory activity of Christ,” what it means for “the presence of the Spirit as actualizing within us the intervening and reconciling work of Christ....”<sup>113</sup> This is the “inaudible echo” again: Those adopted as sons and daughters of God (*theosis!*) in union with Christ through the Spirit experience an “echo inaudibly in our hearts” between Christ and the Spirit, as “the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:15).

God is still *present*. God is still with us. Christ is still working vicariously on our behalf in the midst of our weakness. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is “humanized” by being the bearer of the vicarious humanity of Christ. Therefore, the Spirit is neither an abstract concept (Hegel) nor a divisive and triumphalistic spiritual power (sometimes in Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement), but our entrée into the triune life of God. As Ray Anderson remarks, the “naked,” rampaging power of the Spirit in the Old Testament has now been “clothed,” (“domesticated,” or can we even say “housebroken,” as Anderson said in

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<sup>110</sup> Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 147.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

a lecture, with a twinkle in his eye!), clothed with the humanity of Christ.<sup>114</sup> The vicarious humanity of Christ represents the response of the Spirit-filled Son to the Father, sending the Spirit back to the Father so that the Spirit of Pentecost may be spread upon the church (Acts 2:33). This, Hans Urs von Balthasar contends, means that the incarnate Son is the way by which “the Spirit has acquired a kind of earthly experience,” and thus a new unity between the Son and the Spirit.<sup>115</sup> A “new form” is also created that “unites the bodily and the spiritual.”<sup>116</sup> As Paul reminds us, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deeps for words” (Romans 8:26). As von Balthasar adds, “Christ knew well what he meant by the Father’s ‘name,’ his ‘kingdom,’ and his ‘will,’ but do we really know what this means?”<sup>117</sup> The Spirit enables us to participate in the Son’s knowledge of the Father’s “name,” “kingdom,” and “will” (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22).

A new understanding of the power of God can lead to re-imagining the nature of our responses to God. This is one way to respond to frequent critiques of Torrance’s doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ that it has no place for our subjective response of faith and obedience, if Christ has already responded for us. The baptism of Christ as the foundation for our baptism is instructive for Torrance, for in it we have the Son’s obedient reception to the Father’s voice and the bestowal of the Spirit as a vicarious act, taking the place and on behalf of sinners (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). John was surprised that Jesus wanted to be baptized and would have prevented him, saying “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (Matthew 3:14). But baptism was for sinners, not for Jesus, unless one sees Jesus’ baptism as a *vicarious* act. But being vicarious does not preclude his followers’ action, even in baptizing. They are commanded, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them in the

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<sup>114</sup> Ray S. Anderson, “Christian Community and the Kingdom of God,” lecture notes, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1980: Anderson, *Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God*, 232. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF 3.17.1: “accustomed” to our humanity.

<sup>115</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 175.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, 374.

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ..." (Matthew 28:19). A "genuine reciprocity" of the vicarious humanity of Christ is being established in humanity, creating a unity of divine and human agency.<sup>118</sup> As Alexandra Radcliff observes, "For the Torrances, the Holy Spirit is the means by whom humanity is unconditionally adopted into the divine life, with liberating, intimate, and transformative implications."<sup>119</sup>

Yet our human responses, the baptism of Christ teaches us, do not infringe upon the sovereign free act of God. Except for the very rare "believer's Baptist," we *do not baptize ourselves*.<sup>120</sup> Instead, we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). With the Spirit, it is emphasized that baptism is something the Spirit continues to do, just as Jesus was continually led by the Spirit during his earthy life and ministry, a point stressed by contemporary "Spirit Christology" (Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1). What does the Holy Spirit do? He unites us to Christ so that we might continually participate in the only perfect faithfulness and obedience, that of the Son sent by the Father. This is the genuine "power" of God, that is both cross and resurrection. Barth can speak of this in Augustinian terms of the divine love between the Father and the Son in the Spirit, as "our action" as a genuine action, but still "a reflection of His eternal love," made manifest in the vicarious actions of Christ:

As God is Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, as He gives Himself into human life as Spirit, and as He bears witness as Spirit to our spirit that we are His children (Rom. 8:16), God gives us to participate in the love in which as Father He loves the Son and as Son the Father, making our action a reflection of His eternal love, and ourselves those who may and will love.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Torrance, "The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church," 102.

<sup>119</sup> Alexandra S. Radcliff, *The Claim of Humanity in Christ: Salvation and Sanctification in the Theology of T. F. and J. B. Torrance* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 85.

<sup>120</sup> Torrance, "The One Baptism Common to Christ and His Church," 103.

<sup>121</sup> Barth, *CD IV/2*, 778-79.

This is the nature of communion. Atonement creates, Torrance contends, "the pure objectivity of love ... in which God does not override man but recreates, reaffirms him and stands him up before himself as his dear child," to liberate man "from himself that he can love his neighbour objectively also."<sup>122</sup> This "opened up heaven for earth," establishing communion so that God "is free really to give himself to man," and coming *into* man in the Holy Spirit "opens him *out* for God."<sup>123</sup> But this is only because "at the very heart of the movement is the act of God in which he became man in order to take man's place, and give man a place within the communion of the divine life."<sup>124</sup> The substitutionary life and work of Christ, in all of the depth of its vicarious humanity, is the basis of this communion. The Spirit then pours the love of God into our hearts (Romans 5:5)

not simply as the actualizing within us of what God has already wrought for us in Jesus Christ once and for all, but as opening us up within our subjectivities for Christ in such a radical way that we find our life not in ourselves but out of ourselves, objectively in him.<sup>125</sup>

This "dimension of depth," Torrance contends, is also true in the constant nourishing of the life of the Spirit in the Christian life found in Christ's presence in the Eucharist.<sup>126</sup> No mere remembrance of Christ, the Eucharist is our participation in union with "the mind and will of Jesus" through the Spirit.<sup>127</sup> The vicarious humanity of Christ is still in effect, even in the life of the Spirit, and especially in our partaking of the Eucharist through its "Godward," "upward" movement of worship. Christ is the One who is the "Offerer and the Offering": this is the vicarious worship by Christ seen in Chrysostom's liturgy. This is said right in the middle of

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<sup>122</sup> Torrance, "The Relevance of the Doctrine of the Spirit for Ecumenical Theology," 237.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> See especially T. F. Torrance, "The Paschal Mystery of Christ and the Eucharist" in *Theology in Reconciliation*, 106-38; See also George Hunsinger, "The Dimension of Depth: Thomas F. Torrance on the Sacraments" in Colyer, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 139-60.

<sup>127</sup> Torrance, "The Paschal Mystery of Christ and the Eucharist," 118.



the liturgy of Eastern Orthodoxy.<sup>128</sup> Here is the power of God today, Christ the Word of God, effected by the Spirit of God.

Such an understanding of power defines our understanding of weakness as well. Bonhoeffer can hold to Christ as “the weak Word,” and still criticize the church for “exploiting human weaknesses” by always presenting God as only the resource when our resources fail.<sup>129</sup> No, the church should not stand “at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village.”<sup>130</sup> The “middle of the village” is the Incarnation, “the Word” who “became flesh and lived among us” (literally, “tabernacled,” as God did with Israel, Psalm 78:60 LXX) (John 1:14).<sup>131</sup> How the church does this is to participate in the continuing life of Christ and his life of vicarious humanity, which provides the response we are unable and too weak to give.

Such a way of thinking can help us in re-evaluating our own weakness in terms of how God has used weakness in himself. This should not be done in thinking that, again, Christ is only an example of how to be “powerful in weakness.” No, the vicarious weakness of Christ is unique. But it does encourage us not to count our inabilities and failures as limitations to the grace and love of God. Often we are constricted by what we think that God can do. Torrance cites the church father Hilary of Poitiers’ argument that divine power should not be viewed in terms of what we think God can do, but what he has *actually done* in Jesus Christ.<sup>132</sup> Here we have a power in weakness that we cannot grasp, Torrance exclaims: “That God Almighty should become so little, poor and helpless, all for our sake, while remaining who he eternally is as God, was an act of indescribable majesty and

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<sup>128</sup> “The Prayer of the Cherubimic Hymn” in “The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom,” Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, *Service Book of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church*, tenth edition, 1971 (1997), 105.

<sup>129</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 265-66, 366-67.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 366-67.

<sup>131</sup> Karl Barth, *Witness to the Word: A Commentary on John 1*, ed. Walther Fürst and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 94.

<sup>132</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, *NPNF*, 3:1-5. Cf. 1:5; 2:33, cited by Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 82.

power beyond anything that unaided human reason could grasp."<sup>133</sup> That kind of power is the freedom of God.<sup>134</sup> The Spirit joins with the Father and the Son in the triune identity of God. That is why Barth argues that the Trinity speaks of God as Lord.<sup>135</sup> Such a Lord comes to us through his Spirit to help us in our weakness, even our inability to pray, to be spiritual (Romans 8:26-27). The power of the Spirit is this kind of intercessory ministry, a participation in the continuing vicarious humanity of Christ.

The *promise* of the Holy Spirit, Barth contends, is rightly how the Spirit continues to live today, in an eschatological sense. This is no weakening form of the Spirit to speak of it as "promise."<sup>136</sup> We live in the "promise" today because there is a future to our time, as much as the last time has been inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ. We live now this "dying and rising" with Christ (Romans 6), union with Christ as inseparable from his vicarious humanity. This living in the future is spectacularly portrayed in Romans chapter eight, where we are adopted as sons and daughters through the Son, borne witness to by the Spirit (8:15-16).<sup>137</sup> We have the vicarious intercession of the Spirit (8:26-27), which "will give life to your mortal bodies" (8:11), the bodies of "the glory about to be revealed to us" (8:18), "the redemption of our bodies" (8:23). This goal is "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (8:29; cf. 1 John 3:2: "when he appears we shall be like him" and Colossians 3:3: We are "hidden with Christ in God").<sup>138</sup> For Christ is the One who, having risen and ascended, did not forsake his humanity, and having poured out his Spirit upon us (Acts 2:33), is now our Priest, interceding for us (Hebrews 7:25). It might even be said, James Torrance suggests, that the purpose of the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ was that we might receive

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<sup>133</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 82. Cf. Hilary, *On the Trinity NPNF*, 2.24-27; 3:20; 9.4-14.

<sup>134</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 47.

<sup>135</sup> Barth, *CD I/1*, 306.

<sup>136</sup> Barth, *CD IV/3.1*, 295.

<sup>137</sup> Radcliff, *The Claim of Humanity in Christ*, 85.

<sup>138</sup> Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 8.

the Holy Spirit, in order to have communion with God.<sup>139</sup> We pray to Christ our High Priest in the midst of our weaknesses. We can only do this in the Spirit.<sup>140</sup>

To acknowledge our weakness, however, and then to embrace the power of the weakness of Christ, is not the end point. To participate in Christ's weakness means to participate in his *continual* suffering for others. Eberhard Bethge boldly states that Christ as "the weak Word ... touches on the most profound idea ever expressed by Bonhoeffer: discipleship as participation in Christ's suffering for others."<sup>141</sup> For Bonhoeffer, what he calls *Stellvertretung* (first translated as "deputyship" and now as "vicarious representative action") is do for others what they cannot do for themselves.<sup>142</sup> This is different from the kind of patronizing liberalism which is so prevalent in the churches. Bonhoeffer's deputyship is based on Christ's vicarious humanity, in which he became *and remains* the Deputy for us. Our participation in his life is more than just following his example ("What would Jesus do?"). We care to ask, where is Christ suffering vicariously *now*? Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* puts it plainly:

The life of Jesus Christ here on earth has not yet concluded. Christ

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<sup>139</sup> James B. Torrance, "Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ" in *A Passion for Christ: The Vision That Ignites Ministry*, 59.

<sup>140</sup> Torrance, "Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ," 64.

<sup>141</sup> Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, revised edition, revised and edited by Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 456.

<sup>142</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 257-60 for Bonhoeffer's most mature discussion of *Stellvertretung*, his understanding of the vicarious humanity of Christ. According to Bonhoeffer scholar Clifford Green, this is "one of Bonhoeffer's central theological ethical ideas" (Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 257, n.38), first developed in his initial doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 1, ed. Clifford Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 120, 155-56, 184, 191. Clifford Green, editor in 10, n.29: "*Stellvertretung* is one of Bonhoeffer's fundamental theological concepts throughout his writings. Literally the word means to represent in place of another – to act, advocate, intercede on behalf of another; we translate this as 'vicarious representative action.' As a theological concept in the strict sense it is rooted in Christology and refers to the free initiative and responsibility that Christ takes for the sake of humanity in his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection – it is not just a soteriological concept applied only to the cross (as 'vicarious' might suggest). By anthropological analogy, *Stellvertretung* involves acting responsibly on behalf of others and on behalf of communities to which one belongs."

continues to live it in the lives of his followers. To describe this reality we must not speak about our Christian life but about the true life of Jesus Christ in us. 'It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20).<sup>143</sup>

## Conclusion

In an age of new attention to the Holy Spirit and spiritual formation, T. F. Torrance's doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ provides an important contribution in maintaining a Christocentric theology while acknowledging the importance of the Spirit. He provides a radical representation and substitution of our humanity as the substance of the Christian life. To acknowledge the Jesus of the Gospels as a Spirit-led believer is one step in constructing a robust "Word/Spirit" Christology which is neither "Logos" exclusive nor "Spirit" exclusive, but reflects the Incarnation of the Triune God. That is the basis then for the Christian being led by the Spirit of the Son of the Father.

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<sup>143</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 4, eds. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 286-87.

## **YOU WONDER WHERE THE PNEUMATOLOGY WENT?**

### **Thomas F. Torrance and Third Article Theology**

**Myk Habets**

mhabets@laidlaw.ac.nz

**Abstract:** *The contention of this essay is that despite Torrance's rigorous and developed trinitarianism in which the Holy Spirit is often discussed, Torrance's theology lacks what we might term a robust pneumatology. In this essay, a doctrine of the Holy Spirit indicates a considered and even comprehensive place is given to the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Holy Trinity. A pneumatology, however, is a more expansive enterprise in which the person and work of the Holy Spirit are studied in detail. Torrance's theology is rich in its discussion of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit but at the same time offers a deficient pneumatology. The essay proceeds along the following lines: first, Torrance's commitment to an orthodox trinitarianism is established before, second, Torrance's doctrine of the Holy Spirit is described. Finally, the deficiencies in Torrance's pneumatology will be identified and discussed.*

## Introduction

Thomas F. Torrance offers a richly textured theology of the Trinity across his expansive corpus. Paul Molnar rightly chose to call Torrance the “theologian of the Trinity” when he penned his critical summary of Torrance’s theological contributions.<sup>1</sup> To say that Torrance was one of the most thoroughgoing and comprehensive theologians of the Trinity throughout the latter half of the twentieth century should not be controversial to any well-informed reader of theology. The contention of this essay is that despite Torrance’s rigorous and developed trinitarianism in which the Holy Spirit is often discussed, Torrance’s theology lacks what we might term a robust pneumatology. On the surface, this may sound contradictory, so let me explain. In this essay, a doctrine of the Holy Spirit indicates a considered and even comprehensive place is given to a discussion of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Holy Trinity. A pneumatology, however, is a more expansive enterprise in which the person and work of the Holy Spirit is studied in detail and in relation to other doctrines such as creation, salvation, or eschatology. This is an idiosyncratic distinction between a doctrine of the Spirit and a pneumatology, and is used here for illustrative purposes. A pneumatology is a thick description of the effect a doctrine of the Spirit has upon the system of theology. It may be useful to illustrate by use of a contrast. Torrance’s work clearly presents a doctrine of Jesus Christ and a rigorous Christology. What is the difference? A doctrine of Jesus Christ is concerned with establishing the identity and mission of Jesus; a Christology acts more like a heuristic device and is put to work on helping to define, for example, a cosmology, an epistemology, an eschatology, and so forth. Torrance developed his Christology as rigorously as anyone: he did not do the same with his pneumatology. Torrance’s theology is rich in its discussion of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit but at the same time offers a deficient pneumatology.

The essay proceeds along the following lines: first, Torrance’s commitment to an orthodox trinitarianism is established before, second, Torrance’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit is described. Finally, the deficiencies in Torrance’s pneumatology will be pointed out.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham: Routledge, 2009).

## 1. Orthodox Trinitarianism

Torrance was highly influenced by the church fathers, especially the Greek Fathers of the fourth century. His favorite theologian, he never tired of pointing out, was Athanasius, and the conciliar tradition was the guiding theological interpretation of Holy Scripture throughout Torrance's work. The *homoousion* ("the king-pin of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed"),<sup>2</sup> the hypostatic union, and other patristic formulae were heuristic devices Torrance often put to work in the service of constructive theology. If writing today, Torrance would squarely be considered an advocate of what Lewis Ayres has termed "pro-Nicene" theology (which is also pro-Chalcedonian theology).<sup>3</sup> Torrance is a conciliar theologian in the sense that the creeds of Christendom, along with the confessions of his own Scottish Kirk tradition (and the wider Reformed church), are his theological guides. It is unsurprising, then, that Torrance evinces a commitment to the doctrine of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit as a triune person.

Torrance recognized the sixteenth centenary of the Council of Constantinople in 1981 with two significant works: the first, an edited book on the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of A.D. 381, in which Torrance provided an introductory essay,<sup>4</sup> and the second, the Warfield Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary subsequently published as *The Trinitarian Faith*, in which we find a significant essay on the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> In the earlier work, Torrance affirms the Nicene commitment to understanding the Trinity as the indivisible unity between the Father, Son, and Spirit, even if the Spirit hardly gets a mention in this work. He writes,

What the *homoousion* did was to give expression to the ontological

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "Introduction," in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1981), xi.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Torrance, ed., *The Incarnation*, containing Torrance's "Introduction," xi-xxii, which was originally a sermon preached in Norwich Cathedral.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, Cornerstones Series (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), containing the essay "The Eternal Spirit," 191-251.

substructure upon which the meaning of various biblical texts rested and through which they were integrated. As such, it proved to be one of those movements of thought from a preconceptual to a conceptual act of understanding which the committed mind takes under the compelling demands of the reality into which it inquires, in this instance, the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

In this initial essay, Torrance establishes the truth that the so-called economic Trinity is the same as the ontological Trinity and what is revealed of God by Christ is true.

In the second and more substantial work, Torrance deals at length with the third article of the Creed.<sup>7</sup> Almost all references in this work are to the Fathers of the Greek East — or what Torrance terms “eastern catholic theology.”<sup>8</sup> The key principle of pro-Nicene theology, according to Torrance, is this: only God can reveal God and only so via reconciliation. “Here Torrance is representing a distinctive feature of Christian theology that he first learnt from Barth and then from the patristic theologians, that revelation equals reconciliation, ‘for it is only through reconciliation to God by the blood of Christ that we may draw near to him and have access to him.’”<sup>9</sup>

In his explanation of the third article, Torrance is clear that belief in God means belief in the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, “Thus in the Nicene Creed belief in the Holy Spirit is bracketed together with belief in the Father and in the Son, as belief in one God and Lord.”<sup>10</sup> Further evidence of the divinity and equality of the Spirit is given by the designation “Holy,” which expresses the

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<sup>6</sup> Torrance, “Introduction,” xii–xiii.

<sup>7</sup> A critical introduction to the book can be found here: Myk Habets, “The Essence of Evangelical Theology,” Critical Introduction to Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, in Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, vii–xxxii.

<sup>8</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Habets, “The Essence of Evangelical Theology,” x, citing Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 191.



immanence and “irreducible transcendence” of the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> God is a personal reality and a dynamic event, and this is designated by the term “Holy Spirit.” As the Spirit is Holy and fully God, he draws to himself the same awe and adoration as the Father and the Son.<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that Torrance will shy away from applying this insight, as we shall see below.

The use of the term *S/spirit* in Scripture designates both *ousia* and *hypostasis*, both the generic being of God and the person of the Holy Spirit. From this, Torrance follows Athanasius in articulating the Son as the image (*eidos*) of the Father, and the Spirit is the image (*eidos*) of the Son. For this reason, the fathers can refer to the Spirit as *homoousios* with the Son in the same way as they speak of the Son as *homoousios* with the Father.<sup>13</sup>

In a sort of prolegomenon to the third article, Torrance outlines the fundamental biblical basis upon which a doctrine of the Spirit was established. Uppermost in this regard is the baptismal name for God, the name into which all converts are baptized.<sup>14</sup> The other two places Torrance singles out for mention are the benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 and the teaching on the giver of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. All three texts — Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14, and 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 — start with a different divine person, showing their equality. Other New Testament triadic formulae support this.<sup>15</sup> There is a diversity in order which shows equality and a mixture of doxological and mediatorial terms. The creed thus makes explicit what is found in the New Testament and in early Christian worship (hymns, etc.). From these foundations, a doctrine of the Holy Spirit was then developed by the Greek fathers.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>13</sup> The teaching of the *homoousion* of the Spirit was raised at this time between Nicaea and Constantinople by Epiphanius, etc. See Ibid., 195.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 197, 198. See Rodrick Durst, *Reordering the Trinity: Six Movements of God in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2015).

Torrance looks to Athanasius, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and Epiphanius for the development of a comprehensive doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In their hands, the Son reveals the Father and is *homoousios* with him, the Son reveals the Spirit and is *homoousios* with him, the Spirit reveals the Son and is *homoousios* with him, and the Spirit reveals the Father through the Son and is *homoousios* with him. Torrance can conclude, "The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is derived, therefore, not merely from biblical statements, not from doxological formulae alone, but from the supreme truth that God reveals himself through himself, and therefore that God *himself* is the content of his revelation through the Son and in the Spirit."<sup>16</sup> The result is a fully onto-relational theology whereby each of the divine persons ontologically constitutes the others. Cyril and Basil developed these emphases, but Epiphanius brought them to clear affirmation and influenced the formulation at 381.<sup>17</sup>

From prolegomena, Torrance moves to explication. First, "Spirit" in the absolute sense simply means divine. Thus, no crude use of creaturely or material images of God is admissible. The clear epistemic implication is that we only know God by God, we only know the Spirit from his internal relations within the Godhead *and then* from his economic activity.<sup>18</sup> Based on the belief that the Spirit is divine and on the necessity of the Spirit in the triunity of God, Torrance's argument is that to have the Spirit is to have the entire Godhead. This is the basis for Torrance's rejection of the Basilian (and then Palamite) doctrine of the divine essence *vs.* the divine energies.<sup>19</sup>

Several implications can be drawn from this Nicene teaching on the Spirit. As stated earlier, Spirit implies *ousia* and *hypostasis*, the mystery and ineffability of God. Thus, for Torrance the Holy Spirit remains veiled in a way the Father and the Son are not.<sup>20</sup> The Spirit is the "face of the Father" seen in the face of the Son, yet

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<sup>16</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 202.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 209–10. See Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 224.

<sup>20</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 211.

the Spirit has no face.<sup>21</sup> There are three divine persons but only one image for there is one God. This leads Torrance to declare of the Holy Spirit: "We do not know him face to face in his one hypostasis."<sup>22</sup> We thus experience three hypostaseis "as one person/prosopon."<sup>23</sup>

The *homoousion* of the Son with the Father has the effect of personalizing the Father in our experience. The *homoousion* of the Son with the Spirit has the same effect — it personalizes our experience of the Spirit, and the *homoousion* of the Spirit with the Son personalizes the Son in our experience.<sup>24</sup> Torrance then appeals to Gregory Nyssen that we know the Spirit in a "sublime and exalted" way as "he is in his own person and in his life-giving power."<sup>25</sup> This does appear to contradict Torrance's earlier point that we can't really know the Spirit in his own hypostasis, only through, in, and as, the Son. This is a point of tension in Torrance's trinitarian theology.

Turning again to one of his favorite fathers, Epiphanius, Torrance further develops his relational ontology of the Godhead. Epiphanius spoke of personas as "enhyposstatic" in God, that is, each person coinheres hypostatically in the Godhead.<sup>26</sup> The *homoousion* of the Spirit means the Spirit is "in the midst" of the Father and Son or is the "bond of the Trinity."<sup>27</sup> The Spirit shares fully in the reciprocal knowing and communing of the divine persons and that is what Nicene theology means by God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in onto-relationship. This allows Torrance to advocate for the highly nuanced, but important distinction that

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 213. This is perhaps where I disagree with Torrance the most. I do not see the texts or the theo-logic leading to these consequences, and I think this fails to honor what was affirmed earlier, that we know, honor, and worship the Spirit as we do the Father and the Son. More of this below.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 222.

the *monarchia* of God is not the Father but the Godhead (*ousia*) only then expressed by the Father (*hypostasis*).<sup>28</sup>

Finally, Torrance turns to the procession of the Holy Spirit. As with the Son, so too with the Spirit — both are *homoousios*, both essentially God, and they are so enhypostatically. Torrance is critical of the Cappadocians for introducing cause and sequence into generation and spiration. The Cappadocians located cause in the *person* of the Father and thus introduced an implicitly Arian view of God. Didymus followed suit by replacing the Athanasian and Nicene procession of the Spirit from the *being* of the Father to a formulation that asserted a procession from the *person* of the Father. Gregory Nazianzen and Epiphanius provided a much more compelling account of the Godhead, in Torrance's estimation, in that they did not attribute cause to the person of the Father but to the entire Godhead and only then to the Father. The Spirit proceeds from the Father *with* the Son.<sup>29</sup> What Torrance understands pro-Nicene/pro-Chalcedonian theology arguing is what I call in my writings a relational ontology whereby each person is enhypostatic in the others and the mutual coinherence (*perichoresis*) of the three is their unity.

It was, then, in these terms that Epiphanius interpreted and filled out the succinct Athanasian statement that 'the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and receives from the Son', but in such a way that the enhypostatic realities and distinctive properties of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit always remain the same in the equality and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 223. This is worked out in a comprehensive manner in "The Agreed Statement on the Trinity," in *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vol. 2., ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1993), 219–226.

<sup>29</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 244.

consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity.<sup>30</sup>

Torrance claims, with some justification, that the *Filioque* controversy would have been avoided if Athanasian-Epiphanian-Cyrrillian theology was more closely followed.<sup>31</sup>

As a brief summary, Torrance reads the creeds and adopts them into his theology; the Spirit is the bond of the Trinity; dwells in midst of the Trinity; creates community among God and creatures; and brings human creatures into the divine community. The church, also a part of the third article of the creed and thus part of the Spirit's work, is the body of Christ due to the unique communion and personalization of the Spirit. The church is thus the locus of *theosis*. Torrance's theology is classically conciliar, follows the pro-Nicene/pro-Chalcedonian theology closely, and as such, argues incontrovertibly for the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit as *homoousios* with the Son and by implication with the Father, hence he is fully God, the "the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and (or, through) the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified." This much is clear.

## 2. A Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

That Torrance is committed to an orthodox trinitarianism that includes the full deity of the Holy Spirit has been established. What Torrance goes on to create is what he

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 245. A relational ontology and onto-relational account of the divine being is found more clearly in the works of Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, vol 2: The World: Creation and Deification*, trans. and ed. I. Ionita and R. Barringer (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 260–2; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 317–20; and Thomas G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), among others. For my own constructive work, influenced by the theology of Torrance, see Myk Habets, "Filioque? Nein: A Proposal for Coherent Coinherence," in *Trinitarian Theology after Barth*, ed. Phillip Tolliday and Myk Habets (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 161–202, and "Getting Beyond the *Filioque* with Third Article Theology," in *Ecumenical Perspectives on the Filioque for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2014), 211–30.

<sup>31</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 246. See Myk Habets, "Getting Beyond the Filioque with Third Article Theology," 211–30.

termed a "dynamic Triunity."<sup>32</sup> Dynamic Triunity is Torrance's term for what I am calling a relational ontology of the Godhead. Torrance developed a doctrine of the Trinity that was at once classical and distinct. As seen in the previous section, Torrance's doctrine of the Trinity is classical in the sense that it subscribes to the conciliar tradition and posits one being, three persons, each of those persons are consubstantial and equally God. His work is distinct in that it does not conform to later developments in Latin trinitarianism, nor does it repeat Eastern, especially Cappadocian, emphases that trade on the *monarchia* of the Father. In order to develop such a dynamic Triunity, Torrance says "we must have a proper doctrine of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit."<sup>33</sup>

God's self-communication was fully realized in the incarnation "for it is in hypostatic union that the self-giving of God really breaks through to man, when God becomes himself what man is and assumes man into a binding relation with his own being." But not only is Christ essential, but also the Spirit, "for then the self-giving of God actualises itself in us as the Holy Spirit creates in us the capacity to receive it and lifts us up to participate in the union and communion of the incarnate Son with the heavenly Father."<sup>34</sup> Importantly for Torrance, we know the Spirit not primarily from his economic works but from his relation with the Son (and from the Son's relation with the Father). A doctrine of the Holy Spirit is thus developed from his essential relation to the one God, "and specifically from his inherence in the being of the eternal Son."<sup>35</sup> This principle is crucial for understanding Torrance's doctrine of God and doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Influenced by Athanasius, Torrance formulates his doctrine of the Holy Spirit in a way which is controlled by the prior revelation of the knowledge of the Son and of the Father through the Son.<sup>36</sup> Commenting on Athanasius' theology, Torrance writes:

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<sup>32</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 100.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

Since the Holy Spirit bears the same relation in being and act to God as the Son does to the Father in being *homoousios* with the Father, the Spirit is *homoousios* not only with the Son but with the Father. Moreover, since the Spirit is in himself in accordance with his own nature what he does and bestows upon us from God, he is himself of God and in God and to be confessed as God with the Word; and since the Spirit shares indivisibly with the presence and activity of the Father and the Son in all the acts of the Godhead, he belongs essentially to the divine Triad through an identity of *ousia*.<sup>37</sup>

This lends itself to a “profound objectivity”<sup>38</sup> of the Spirit and the works of the Spirit in the life of the believer and the church. More will be said of this profound objectivity below, suffice to say this is one of the reasons Torrance’s theology lacks a robust pneumatology. The point to be made here is that there is an inherent relation in being and act between the Son and the Spirit; which means to be in the Spirit is to be in the Son, to know the Son is to know the Spirit, and to have the Spirit is to be taken into the sphere of God’s intra-trinitarian communion, whereby:

through the Spirit God is able to take possession of his creatures and to be present to them in such a way that they are lifted up to the level of participation in God where they are opened out for union and communion with God far beyond the limits of their creaturely existence — which is another way of describing *theosis*. To *be* in the Spirit is to *be* in God, for the Spirit is not external but internal to the Godhead; but since it is only the Spirit of God who knows what is in God and it is he who joins us to the Logos in God, through the Spirit we are exalted to know God in his inner intelligible relations as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet in such a way that we are restrained by the sheer holiness and majesty of the divine Being from transgressing the bounds of our creaturely being in inquiring beyond what is given through the Son and received by the Spirit, and therefore from thinking presumptuously

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 234.

and illegitimately of God.<sup>39</sup>

Knowledge of the Spirit is only ever first a knowledge of the Son made possible by the Spirit. Adopting the common teaching on the *taxis* of the divine persons, all divine activity is *from* the Father, *through* the Son, and *in* the Holy Spirit such that "The Holy Spirit is the power of God, the *energeia* of the Son, through whom God realizes and actualizes his works."<sup>40</sup> All the economic activity of the Spirit is presupposed by the work of the Son such that "The creative work of the Spirit is, so to speak, proleptically conditioned by that of redemption."<sup>41</sup> Here Torrance's theology of the Trinity is clear, the work of the Spirit is to reveal the Son, to make the Son known, to make the presence of the Son a reality in the lives of believers. Torrance calls this the Spirit's work of objectivity: to be objective is reasoning in accordance with the nature of the object, and ultimately, God is the object of our study. The Spirit creates in individuals a "recovery of complete objectivity" which is only found in coming into contact with the complete transcendence of God, and that is a distinct work of the Spirit. "That is not something we can achieve," writes Torrance, "but we can let it happen."<sup>42</sup>

This prioritizing of the Son is central to Torrance's theology. The Incarnation is the unique "self-objectification of God," that objectivity "takes concrete form in the historical humanity of Jesus Christ, and therefore confronts us historical human beings right in the midst of our objectivities with the very Being and majesty of God himself."<sup>43</sup> In revealing the reality of the Incarnation of the Son and what that means for us and our salvation we find the true objectivity of the work of the Spirit. Torrance rejects all attempts to make the work of the Spirit objective in its own right, as it were, apart from or even distinct from the Son, "for it is in that context that we are not allowed to confound the objective reality of God with our own subjective states, or to resolve it away as the symbolic counterpart of our human

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 238–239.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1996), 216.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 234.



concerns."<sup>44</sup> This, Torrance avers, "is the epistemological relevance of the Holy Spirit:"<sup>45</sup> namely, to make the Son known and to draw all people up, into union with Christ and communion with God.

Torrance's theology is what might be termed a "second article theology," whereby, referencing the creed, the Son is the mediator between God and humanity and hence the Son is the mediator of the Holy Spirit, and all the work of God in the economy is first of all a work of the Son. Consequently, for this type of theologizing, the Son is the centerpiece of theology and the focus of the economic activity of God. As mentioned earlier, for Torrance

The Holy Spirit is not knowable independently in himself, but he is known through the one Word or self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In himself the Spirit hides himself from us by his very mode of Being as Spirit, and effaces himself in his very mode of Activity as Spirit, throwing his eternal Light upon the Father through the Son and upon the Son in the Father.<sup>46</sup>

A second article theology occludes any direct experience or worship of the Spirit by privileging the exclusive worship of the Son. The Spirit is received by the Son in the Incarnation and hence the Son is "both the God who gives and the Man who receives in one Person" and he is in the unique position to "transfer in a profound and intimate way what belongs to us in our human nature to himself and to transfer what is his to our human nature in him."<sup>47</sup> As Torrance states, "That applies above all to the gift of the Holy Spirit whom he received fully and completely in his human nature for us."<sup>48</sup> All subsequent work of the Spirit is an elongation of the work of the Son, so to speak, but parsed out in such a way that it

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 246.

*appears* that human experiences of the Spirit are essentially denied, in favor of humans' experiencing (or simply knowing) Jesus's experience of the Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

The strength of a second article theology is precisely in the focus on the work of the incarnate Son for us and our salvation. The weaknesses of such a theology, however, are seen downstream, when we come to speak of the reality of salvation, the essence of worship, and we attempt to speak in more detail about the spiritually filled and enabled life. Torrance will struggle to meaningfully relate the Holy Spirit to Christian life and experience in any concrete terms, but more of that below.

Torrance's trinitarian theology is rich and compelling. It is canonical and conciliar and offers at every point the possibility of a robust and compelling pneumatology: an account of the identity and mission of the Holy Spirit, especially the Spirit's work in the life and worship of creatures reconciled to God through their union with Christ and communion with the Father. A clear indication of this compelling richness can be found in the following:

There is one Mediator between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to us only through him as the Spirit of Holiness, the Spirit of Redemption, and the Spirit of Glory. He comes to us from the inner life of Jesus as the Spirit in which he gained the victory over sin and temptation, as the Spirit in which he brought the divine holiness to bear upon our flesh of sin, sanctifying and perfecting in himself the very nature which he took from us, and therefore he comes in all the richness of the divine human holiness of Christ. He comes to us from the triumphant obedience and victory of Christ in his Cross and Resurrection, as the Spirit clothed with mighty, redemptive acts transmitting the energy of Christ's risen and glorified Humanity, and as the Spirit of him who has entered into the new life and inherited all the promises of God, and therefore he comes in all the

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<sup>49</sup> Torrance's theology, while not antithetical to more charismatic forms of Christianity, is not inherently charismatic at all. See Alexandra Radcliffe, *The Claim of Humanity in Christ: Salvation and Sanctification in the Theology of T. F. and J. B. Torrance* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

transforming power of the Saviour and Redeemer of men. He comes to us from the whole life of Christ constituted in death and resurrection as the one, all-sufficient and eternal oblation of mankind, as the Spirit in which Christ lifted up our human nature in worship and prayer and adoration to God, in which at last he presented himself in spotless sacrifice to the Father as the Head of Humanity and through this one offering presented us to him as those whom he had perfected in himself. And therefore the Spirit comes as the Spirit of a Manhood wholly offered to God in perpetual glorification and worship and praise.<sup>50</sup>

And yet, there are limitations. The promise of pneumatology is not fulfilled in Torrance's work. The lofty heights Torrance achieves in his Christology are not met when we try to account for a holistic pneumatology and ask how the work of the Spirit is translated into human experience and where one can point to human worship of the Father, Son, *and* Holy Spirit in the Christian life, both individually and corporately. Here we remember Torrance's insistence that:

We recall too that this transparence comes from the Holy Spirit, from his own self-effacing nature and office in hiding himself, as it were, behind the Face of the Father in the Son and behind the Heart of the Son in the Father, yet revealing the one Triune God by letting his eternal light shine through himself to us.<sup>51</sup>

And further,

The Holy Spirit is not knowable independently in himself, but he is known through the one Word or self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In himself the Spirit hides himself from us by his very mode of Being as Spirit, and effaces himself in his very mode of Activity as Spirit, throwing his eternal Light upon the Father through the Son and upon the Son in the Father.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 248.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

In the following section Torrance's insistence on the self-effacing nature of the Holy Spirit will be used to identify and discuss the lack of a robust pneumatology in his work and ways in which this might be redressed.

### 3. A Deficient Pneumatology

Having clearly demonstrated that Torrance is a trinitarian, and that he has a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Torrance's deficient pneumatology now requires explanation. Earlier I noted Torrance's commitment to an idea he finds in Athanasius, namely the "profound objectivity" by which "the Holy Spirit ... does not carry with it a concept of psychological inwardness in our experience of him or even a notion of sacramental inwardness."<sup>53</sup> While this safeguards an anthropologizing of the Spirit,<sup>54</sup> it unwittingly removes any affectual or experiential aspect from the Christian life.<sup>55</sup> The mysterious objectivity of the Spirit is a constant refrain in Torrance's work. Spirit

expresses the unapproachableness, the ineffability, the unutterable majesty of God. It is this fact that can never be forgotten in the doctrine of the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, or in the relation of the doctrine of the Spirit to any other doctrine, of God or of his works, and this fact which makes precise and clear-cut statements so difficult.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 234.

<sup>54</sup> Torrance names this as his chief concern when he writes: "One of the major lessons we learn from Athanasius and his attack upon Arians and semi-Arians alike is that unless we know the Holy Spirit through the objectivity of the *homoousion* of the Son in whom and by whom our minds are directed away from ourselves to the one Fountain and Principle of Godhead, then we inevitably become engrossed with ourselves, confusing the Holy Spirit with our own spirits, and confounding the one Truth of God with notions of our own devising. In other words, apart from the indissoluble relation of the Spirit and the Incarnate Son, we are unable to distinguish the objective reality of the Lord God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, from our own subjective states and conditions, or from our own creative spirituality," *Ibid.*, 227, and again at 231.

<sup>55</sup> Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3, takes "affect to be a mode of experience that is tethered to physical bodies and that encompasses emotion, feeling, and desire."

<sup>56</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 210.

And clearly, when it came to the Spirit, Torrance struggled to say much at all. To distill Torrance's teaching to a single point we can say that "the Spirit is not cognoscible in himself."<sup>57</sup> Further, the Spirit "hides himself" and remains incomprehensible:<sup>58</sup> "To be concerned with the Spirit, to know him, to be acted on by him, is immediately to be concerned with the Being or *ousia* of God the Creator."<sup>59</sup> Herein we find a contradiction in Torrance's thought. The Spirit is at once unknowable and knowable, hidden yet revealed, silent and yet communicative, experienced and yet not felt. Torrance's recourse is to say that we come to know, hear, and experience the Spirit only as we come to know, hear, and experience the Son, for the two are *homoousios*, and as the Son is *homoousios to Patri*, this is the way we know the Father too.

In an earlier work I argued that:

Davidson maintains that any reclamation of the theological couplet [*an/en-hypostasis*] must be supplemented with a robust pneumatology in order to specify the relevance of the human Jesus for revelation, salvation, anthropology, ethics and ecclesiology. Davidson is surely correct in this assessment and it is at this point that Torrance's theology is somewhat lacking. In his discussion of *enhypostasia* and *anhypostasia*, and other christological themes, Torrance speaks of the Holy Spirit regularly but fails adequately to incorporate a pneumatological discourse. By positing too great an emphasis on the agency of the divine Word on the human nature of Jesus, as opposed to a relation mediated by the Holy Spirit, Torrance implicitly makes the human nature of Christ merely instrumental. It would be too much to suggest that Torrance's christology is docetic or Apollinarian, but his lack of pneumatology in this area does risk bringing him to the brink of such a failing.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 213. Cf. 37.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 226. The Spirit reveals himself to us "by revealing the Father through the Son."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>60</sup> Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 71.

A robust pneumatology would be evident in a detailed discussion of the incarnational dynamics of Jesus' life, in a study of the cross, in issues of practical theology, and most especially, in detailed discussion of the Christian life.<sup>61</sup> It is this final point which others have recently picked up on, notably Simeon Zahl.

In his work *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, Zahl is concerned to make the connections between theology and experience in the belief, well-founded, that theologians often wax eloquent about the theoretical, ontological, or theological aspects of the Christian life, but rarely if ever actually discuss the experiential aspects of the faith. Zahl holds Torrance up as a prime example of this problem.<sup>62</sup> Specifically, Zahl's charge is that

viewed strictly from the perspective of practice and experience rather than theological "correctness," then, the sum of Torrance's claims is the banal and almost contentless assertion that union with Christ will entail deep unspecified changes in our "being." In its lack of specificity, it risks giving theological cover to all sorts of projection. We can potentially take anything we like and call it a form of "actualising our union and communion with God."<sup>63</sup>

While overstated, I share Zahl's critique. Torrance's premise, noted above, is that theologians should have "nothing to do with any attempt to reach an understanding of the Spirit beginning from manifestations or operations of the Spirit in creaturely existence, in man or in the world."<sup>64</sup> He extends that beyond "beginning manifestations" into any and all manifestations.

Christ, who is *homoousios* with God and man, acts for us in every dimension of salvation, such that our salvation is a participation in his already completed salvation. We share via ontological participation in the finished work of Christ. Notions of ransom, sacrifice, propitiation, expiation, reconciliation, and so forth are

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<sup>61</sup> The two published volumes of Torrance's New College lectures go some way to filling in parts of these details, but even here the treatment is cursory.

<sup>62</sup> See Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, 71–72; 74–75; and 95–101.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. The citations are from Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 201.

retained, but contextualized into the more fundamental scheme of participation. By means of the Holy Spirit, people share in the salvation Christ has achieved. The Spirit is the agent of deification. It is here that Zahl finds Torrance wanting:

But what is such participation like from the perspective of the participant? ... Are there any practically recognizable experiential correlates to this process? Does it change our feelings or desires or cognitions or behaviours? ... Torrance makes no attempt to answer these questions.<sup>65</sup>

Zahl's critique then matches my own above, "From the perspective of a full-orbed pneumatology, this seems a deep weakness in Torrance's account."<sup>66</sup>

There are two possibilities for Torrance's silence, according to Zahl: first, "the work of the Spirit in salvation never affects actual human bodies in time"; or second, "there are experiential correlates of participation, but the task of theologically analyzing or describing them is so laden with problems that it should never be attempted."<sup>67</sup> In my estimation, it is the second of these options that accounts for Torrance's silence. Torrance was petrified, like Barth before him, that the Holy Spirit would be confused for some human spirit, and as such, human ideologies would be projected onto God and read back into political action, as was done by the Third Reich. But even Barth could see that the time was coming (he named the year 2000 as that time), when we could talk about the economy of the Spirit without hopelessly confusing the Holy Spirit with any human spirit.

In his theology, Torrance typically defaults to ontological descriptions of the Christian life as opposed to experiential ones. The Spirit works in the ontological depths of our humanity and existence.<sup>68</sup> This, Zahl argues, amounts to a "rhetorical sleight of hand on the subject of experience."<sup>69</sup> He continues, "From the perspective

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<sup>65</sup> Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, 97.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>68</sup> See Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 181, 155, 156, 159 for examples.

<sup>69</sup> Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, 98.

of pneumatology, this will not do. ... a purely 'invisible' Christianity is one that does not take seriously the reality of the Holy Spirit."<sup>70</sup>

Once again echoing my own conclusions, Zahl writes,

absent any affectively and experientially plausible account of how *theosis* might play out in the world, Torrance's soteriology ends up operating, in practice, at the level of pure conceptuality. It functions as a kind of pneumatological Docetism: it has no real connection to bodies, just the appearance of such a connection.<sup>71</sup>

Zahl concludes, "far from reintegrating experience into theology, Torrance's account of participation simply reestablishes an earlier Protestantism's naïve anti-experientialism on a framework of deification."<sup>72</sup>

#### **4. A Torrancean Pneumatology**

The challenge for Torrance scholars is how to move beyond Torrance without leaving him behind. Zahl's critique is articulate and compelling. We should not, however, throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water. Torrance's work is not invalidated because of such critiques. Rather, what is required is for scholars of Torrance's work to retrieve his crucial insights and then constructively go beyond them in delineating a robust pneumatology that can deliver on the promise of Torrance's work. As Zahl argued, "in order to combat the problem of projection, theologians should seek to draw connections between metaphysical or otherwise abstract dogmatic statements about the status of believers before God in the Spirit and their phenomenological correlates."<sup>73</sup> That is a huge job and one beyond the parameters of a short essay. The contours of such a project can, however, be sketched.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 75. The citations concludes, "and where possible to refuse the distinction entirely." I disagree with this added point; a distinction is still helpful, a separation is not.



Earlier I named Torrance's theology as a species of second article theology, one that is materially focused on the work of the incarnate Son to the exclusion of the distinct (but never separate!)<sup>74</sup> mission of the Holy Spirit. A Third Article Theology (TAT) is an attempt to complement first and second article theologies with an emphasis on the mission of the Spirit in parallel and harmony with the mission of the Son.<sup>75</sup> Where Torrance's work is richly and rightly Christological, TAT would add to such an account an equally rich and textured account of the identity and mission of the Holy Spirit. This could take several forms: where Torrance articulates the life of Christ others could go on and fill that out with an equally articulate account of the life of the Spirit in the life of Christ (a Spirit Christology); where Torrance makes claims for the importance of the Spirit in the Christian life others could go on to specifically speak about what union and communion with God looks like, feels like, and what embodied practices are part of that (*theosis*); and where Torrance limits the sphere of the Spiritual (the work of the Spirit in embodied experience) to the hypothetical and metaphysical, others could speak into a thoroughly practical theology, embedded in human practices and habits, liturgical rites and spiritual formation (a *communio* ecclesiology).

To continue the work of Torrance is not to restate his theology but to retrieve it and then build upon it in ways he did not. As the "personalising person," as Torrance was fond of saying,<sup>76</sup> the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer needs description and analysis. What does an onto-relational concept of person mean for

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<sup>74</sup> "There is no separate activity of the Holy Spirit in revelation or salvation in addition to or independent of the activity of Christ, for what he does is to empower and actualise the words and works of Christ in our midst as the words and works of the Father" – Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 196. There may not be a separate mission of the Spirit but there is a distinction to be made, and while Torrance recognize this (think for example of his appreciative acceptance of Basil's notion of the economic taxis of the Trinity), he does not expend any words in describing the fuller mission of the Holy Spirit as a Third Article Theology is wont to do. What Torrance does tend to do is collapse the mission of the Spirit into the mission of the Son, whereas the obverse is generally true today: many today want to collapse the mission of the Son into the mission of the Spirit!

<sup>75</sup> A comprehensive account of Third Article Theology can be found in Myk Habets, ed., *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016). The genesis of TAT can be traced back to insights of Karl Barth and the seminal work of D. Lyle Dabney.

<sup>76</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 230, 231, and elsewhere.

human communities? What does it mean to be full of the Spirit and conformed to the image of Christ from glory to glory? How is *theosis* worked out within the locus of gathered communities of faith? Perhaps most acutely, how do we talk about the fact that in Christ we have access to the Father through the Spirit such that we are brought into the Father's presence?<sup>77</sup>

These deeply real and deeply profound theological truths mean a lot and as long as they remain ontological, metaphysical notions, or as long as they remain purely indicative theological statements, they remain aloof and often inaccessible to the apprehension of most Christians.<sup>78</sup> Torrance wrote, as we saw above, of a false objectivity. We need to be aware of a different form a false objectivity can take. Where Torrance only saw the dangers of a false subjectivity, whereby notions of the human spirit or human experience would be projected onto God and read back into the economy, we need to be alert to another form of false objectivity whereby human experiences are entirely removed from the sphere of the Spirit's work. This is where Zahl's work offers a clarion call. While the Spirit remains sovereign over all human experiences, he chooses to work in the lives of embodied spiritual and emotional creatures. I believe this is why Torrance found an epistemological home in a theological form of critical realism, for the very reason that one does not have to deny genuine human experience as a sphere in which God works by his Spirit.<sup>79</sup> As Torrance said, the presence of God the Holy Spirit creates *koinonial* relations and "renews relationships in society."<sup>80</sup> This results in radical reconstruction of entire social networks and communities. These radical *koinonial* implications need to be named, identified, and discussed, otherwise they are theoretical platitudes dislocated from the realities of life.

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<sup>77</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 292.

<sup>78</sup> This fact explains in part the difficulty many find in reading Torrance's work.

<sup>79</sup> See further in Myk Habets, *Theology in Transposition: A Constructive Appraisal of T.F. Torrance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press Academic, 2013), 91–120; and 121–140.

<sup>80</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 62.

## Conclusion

Simeon Zahl has called on theologians to engage embodied practices of lived experience and not retreat into metaphysical ghettos or abstract theologizing. Torrance's theology is held up as a prime example of how not to do theology (or at least, how not to do practical theology). Zahl's critique, while overdrawn, highlights areas in which those following Torrance could be invited to see the tremendous contribution his theology has made and continue that contribution by adding to it a more practical and grounded application of his theology to life and ministry. We see hints of this already in the recent works of Eric Flett,<sup>81</sup> Joseph Sherrard,<sup>82</sup> Paul Molnar,<sup>83</sup> and Kevin Navarro,<sup>84</sup> and others.<sup>85</sup> It is hoped that an essay like this might be a stimulus to further work beyond Torrance in these and other areas. A robust pneumatology has to flesh out and expand a robust Christology; anything less is a trinitarian diminution.

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<sup>81</sup> Eric G. Flett, *Persons, Powers, and Pluralities: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

<sup>82</sup> Joseph H. Sherrard, *T. F. Torrance as Missional Theologian: The Ascended Christ and the Ministry of the Church* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021).

<sup>83</sup> Paul D. Molnar, *Freedom, Necessity, and the Knowledge of God: In Conversation with Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2022).

<sup>84</sup> Kevin J. Navarro, *Trinitarian Doxology: T.F. and J.B. Torrance's Theology of Worship as Participation by the Spirit in the Son's Communion with the Father* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020).

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, various essays in *Torrance and Evangelical Theology: A Critical Evaluation*, ed. Myk Habets and Lucas Stamps (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2022).



## **WRESTLING WITH AN ANGEL:**

### **T. F. Torrance's Reception of Edward Irving Reappraised**

**Jerome Van Kuiken, Ph.D.**

**Professor of Christian Thought, Oklahoma Wesleyan University**

jvankuiken@okwu.edu

**Abstract:** *Since the publication of my previous research on T. F. Torrance's reception of the pneumatologically-oriented Christology of Edward Irving, new data have emerged to challenge the account I gave. This essay evaluates the fresh evidence and sets it in context, then identifies several points of continuity and discontinuity between Torrance and Irving. At issue is not merely a correct reading of the past but also the present and future development of Christology and pneumatology. Consequently, the final section of the essay suggests implications of my findings for the subjective and practical correlates of Torrancean theology, as well as defending the viability of my prior proposal for moving toward resolution in the debate over "fallenness" Christology.*

But it was only when I studied Karl Barth's account of [Christ's assumption of fallen human nature] that its truth broke in upon my mind in a quite unforgettable way. I refer to that section in the *Church Dogmatics* 1.2 where Barth expounded the mystery of the virgin birth. Overwhelmed by the immense significance of what our Lord had done all for our sakes and in our place, I fell to the ground on my knees trembling in awe and wonder at the sheer miracle of God's grace in the birth, life, and passion of Jesus — the miracle that foul, wicked,

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depraved humanity twisted in upon itself, had been appropriated from us by the Son of God and been cleansed, changed, redeemed, and sanctified in him.<sup>1</sup>

So reminisced T. F. Torrance about his experience when, as a student in Basel in 1937–1938, he read §15.2–3 of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*.<sup>2</sup> (The English translation would have to await his own supervision in later years.) In this passage, not only did he encounter Barth's exposition of a "fallenness" Christology, but also his appeal to several nineteenth-century precursors of this view, among them a fellow Scot: Edward Irving (1792–1834). Barth drew his information on Irving from a source familiar to Torrance, his own beloved, recently-deceased Edinburgh teacher Hugh Ross Mackintosh (1870–1936).<sup>3</sup> Irving was an innovative, controversial thinker who advocated not only "fallenness" Christology (for which he was excommunicated by the Church of Scotland) but also kenoticism, Spirit Christology, the charismata, and millennialism. Torrance adopted and adapted much of Barth's theology. What, though, of his reception of Irving?

My previously-published research gave the following answer:<sup>4</sup> Despite Barth's use of Mackintosh to commend Irving, Mackintosh's own account is critical of Irving's Christology. Torrance showed his debts to both Mackintosh and Barth when, in his 1938–1939 Auburn Seminary lectures, he embraced Barth's "fallenness" Christology while distancing himself from Irving. Torrance specifically objected to Irving's "almost ... Ebionite" view that Christ's human nature remained *morally corrupt* (not just *physically corruptible*) throughout his earthly life and that his sinlessness was only due to the Holy Spirit's indwelling rather than to the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster and Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 441–442.

<sup>2</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 45.

<sup>3</sup> Barth, *CD I/2*, 154, cites H. R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1931), 277. For Torrance's reminiscences on Mackintosh, see T. F. Torrance, "Appreciation: Hugh Ross Mackintosh Theologian of the Cross" in H. R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, ed. T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 71–94. (This brief work of Mackintosh's is a précis of his larger work cited by Barth.)

<sup>4</sup> E. Jerome Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 32–40, 43, 75.

sanctifying effect of the hypostatic union itself.<sup>5</sup> In Torrance's later years, he never again mentioned Irving — not in his Edinburgh lectures,<sup>6</sup> nor in his volume on the history of Scottish theology,<sup>7</sup> nor in his other writings. The closest he came was in 1984, in a reply to an editorial that chided Irving and Barth for their "fallenness" Christology. Torrance's letter to the editor names neither man, instead appealing to the Greek Fathers and Calvin to assert:

While our Lord was linked through His mother to "the genetic stream of the race", he was altogether sinless, having neither actual nor inherent sin of any kind.... [I]n the very act of taking our fallen Adamic nature the Son of God redeemed, renewed and sanctified it AT THE SAME TIME.... The only human nature which our Lord HAD, therefore, was utterly pure and sinless. His humanity was not some new *creatio ex nihilo*, or some kind of neutral humanity quite foreign to us. No, it was *our* Adamic nature, *our* "flesh of sin", which *in assuming he healed and purified*. That is the important interlocking of the continuity and discontinuity in both the Virgin Birth and in the Crucifixion and Resurrection.<sup>8</sup>

So ran my account of Torrance's reception of Irving. In point of fact, however, I had overlooked a pair of post-Auburn references by Torrance to Irving: one direct, one indirect.<sup>9</sup> In what follows, I examine this fresh evidence and reappraise Torrance's reception of Irving in light of it. At issue is not merely a

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 121–123 (quotation from 121).

<sup>6</sup> Now published as Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster and Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008) and Torrance, *Atonement*.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "Christ's human nature," *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland* (May 1984), 114 (capitalization and italics his; I have removed paragraph breaks). The editorial to which he replies is [Donald Macleod], "Did Christ have a fallen human nature?," *Monthly Record* (March 1984), 51–53. Thanks to Donald Macleod for copies of both his editorial and Torrance's letter.

<sup>9</sup> Thanks to Richard McIntosh for calling my attention to these references and for sharing an audio file of Torrance's BBC interview (on which see below).

correct reading of the past but also the present and future development of Christology and pneumatology.<sup>10</sup>

## The Angel and the Footnote

Seven months after the publication of Torrance's letter, the BBC broadcast excerpts from an interview with him as part of a radio documentary on the life of Edward Irving. The broadcast was titled "Angel of Regent Square," an allusion to Irving's being dubbed "angel" by his Regent Square, London parishioners on the model of the Apocalypse's angels of the churches (Revelation 2–3, with "angels" interpreted here as human rather than heavenly ministers). In the interview, Torrance contrasts Irving with his contemporaries, who insisted on Christ's unfallen humanity:

Irving was the one who was the true theologian. His doctrine was that Christ, the Son of God, in becoming man, took human nature from the Virgin Mary, who was a sinner like all other human beings, so that he took the flesh of sin — he took fallen human nature on him. Of course, Irving held that Jesus Christ in his human nature was holy and perfectly sinless.... For Irving, the Son of God penetrated into the depths of our human being to get at guilt and sin from the inner depths of our humanity.... And he worked it out in such a way that it came to its climax in the cross.<sup>11</sup>

Here Torrance contradicts his earlier judgment of Irving. At Auburn, he had insisted that "we are to think of Christ's flesh as perfectly and completely sinless in his own nature, and not simply in virtue of the Spirit as Irving puts it."<sup>12</sup> Now he claims that "Irving held that Jesus Christ in his human nature was holy and perfectly sinless" — that is, that Irving's view agrees with Torrance's. Torrance goes on to describe Irving as seeking to retrieve the Christology of the Greek Fathers whom Torrance

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<sup>10</sup> This essay will not address eschatology. Torrance's amillennialism sharply contrasts with Irving's premillennialism, although both men shared an interest in the Jewish people.

<sup>11</sup> "Angel of Regent Square," written and researched by Andrew Walker, BBC Radio 4 (Dec. 1, 1984), 16:52–17:22, 30:20–30:44.

<sup>12</sup> Torrance, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 122.



so esteemed.<sup>13</sup> As for Irving's proto-Pentecostalism, Torrance comments that it arose from his faith in "a living God" who was present and active among believers, coupled with Irving's "Romantic personality."<sup>14</sup>

In addition to this direct mention of Irving in 1984, there is an indirect reference to him buried in a footnote of Torrance's volume *The Trinitarian Faith*, published in 1988 as an expanded version of lectures given in 1981.<sup>15</sup> Here Torrance concludes his discussion of Athanasius' doctrine that Christ assumed and sanctified sinful human nature with a citation of two pages from a book by Scottish charismatic theologian Thomas Smail.<sup>16</sup> That book as a whole promotes a synthesis of charismatic experience with Reformed theology, especially Christology, with Irving repeatedly presented as an exemplar.<sup>17</sup> On the pages cited by Torrance, Smail affirms both that Christ is "entirely without sin" and that "he enters completely into the situation of sinners, and is in every respect exposed to every external and internal pressure that comes against them."<sup>18</sup> Smail then appeals for

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<sup>13</sup> "Angel," 17:38–18:05.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 18:06–19:00. "Romantic" here nods to Irving's proclivity toward his era's Romanticism, including his discipleship to S. T. Coleridge. See, e.g., Peter Elliott, "Edward Irving: Romantic Theology in Crisis" (PhD thesis, Murdoch University, 2010), <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/2996/> and Nicholas John Cuthbert Tucker, "In Search of the Romantic Christ: The Origins of Edward Irving's Theology of Incarnation" (PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 2018), <http://hdl.handle.net/1893/27283>.

<sup>15</sup> On the origins of *Trinitarian Faith's* content, see Myk Habets, "'The Essence of Evangelical Theology': Critical Introduction to Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*," in Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, second edition (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), viii, as well as Torrance's own comments on pp. 1–2.

<sup>16</sup> Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 162 n.53, citing Thomas A. Smail, *Reflected Glory: The Spirit in Christ and Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 67–68.

<sup>17</sup> See Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 39–40, 68, 74, 76–77, 92–93.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 67.

support to Barth, Irving, and Torrance himself, as well as “all the impressive array of authorities mustered by Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour*.”<sup>19</sup>

In short, during the 1980s Torrance communicated approval of Irving directly in a radio interview and indirectly through a letter to an editor and a footnote in *Trinitarian Faith*. This evidence bears further contextualization: before his retirement from Edinburgh University in 1979, T. F. Torrance would assign his pupils to summarize Barth’s *CD I/2*, §15 — the very passage on “fallenness” Christology that had so moved him as a student, and the single passage in all the *Church Dogmatics* that cites Irving.<sup>20</sup> Students also took a course in Scottish theological history under T. F.’s brother J. B., who devoted a full lecture to Irving’s doctrines of the Incarnation and the baptism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup> J. B. likewise promoted Irving in print and by supervising doctoral theses that sought to demonstrate the consonance of Irving’s Christology with that of the Greek Fathers, the Reformers, and T. F.<sup>22</sup> The Torrance brothers’ efforts thus combined to

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<sup>19</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 68, 75 n.4 (quotation from latter). The reference is to Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Human Nature of Christ in Relation to Original Sin, with Special Reference to its Soteriological Significance* (London: Epworth, 1962). Johnson surveys eighteen proponents of “fallenness” Christology from Barth, Torrance, and others in the twentieth century back through the nineteenth-century precursors claimed by Barth in *CD I/2*, 154–155 and at last to a seventeenth-century pioneer of the modern “fallenness” position, the mystic Antionette Bourignon (137–185). Johnson finds patristic precedent for this view in Gregories Nazianzen and Nyssen (129–132).

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Ritchie, *T. F. Torrance in Recollection and Reappraisal* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 167.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 223. Wherever I refer simply to “Torrance,” T. F. is in view.

<sup>22</sup> James B. Torrance, “The Vicarious Humanity of Christ,” in Thomas F. Torrance, ed., *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), 141, refers positively to Irving alongside Barth. J. B. supervised the following doctoral theses at the University of Aberdeen: Jacob Jamani Nantomah, “Jesus the God-Man: The Doctrine of the Incarnation in Edward Irving in the Light of the Teaching of the Church Fathers and Its Relevance for a Twentieth Century African Context” (1982); Kang Phee Seng (P. S. Kang), “The Concept of the Vicarious Humanity of Christ in the Theology of Thomas Forsyth Torrance” (1983), which covers Irving on pp. 261–262, 273; David William Dorries, “Nineteenth Century British Christological Controversy, Centring upon Edward Irving’s Doctrine of Christ’s Human Nature” (1987), published as David W. Dorries, *Edward Irving’s Incarnational Christology* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon, 2002). J. B. also served as general editor of The Devotional Library series, including Graham McFarlane, *Edward Irving: The Trinitarian Face of God* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1996).

rehabilitate Irving. The early misgivings that T. F. had displayed in his Auburn lectures would seem long gone — or were they?

### **Flattening Fallenness, Cautious of Charismata**

In assessing Torrance's reception of *any* historical figure, one must bear in mind his oft-noted "tendency ... to flatten the historical details of theological debate and development, which inclines towards Torrance reading history as a vast account of his own theological positions."<sup>23</sup> One example germane to this essay is the later Torrance's linking of H. R. Mackintosh with "fallenness" Christology when in fact Mackintosh was its critic.<sup>24</sup> Another example appears in the same passage in *Trinitarian Faith* that footnotes Smail: as evidence of patristic "fallenness" Christology, Torrance writes, "Thus Athanasius could say that 'the whole Christ became a curse for us.'"<sup>25</sup> In its original context, however, Athanasius is *denying* that the whole Christ became a curse, just as the Logos did not become wholly flesh: "We do not conceive the whole Word Himself to be flesh, but to have put on flesh ... we do not simply [i.e. simplistically] conceive this, that the whole Christ has become a curse and sin, but that He has taken on Him the curse."<sup>26</sup> A final example occurs in Torrance's *Scottish Theology*, in which he renders Thomas Boston's statement that Christ assumed human nature "with all its sinless infirmities" as "with all its *sinful* infirmities."<sup>27</sup>

Torrance's flattening tendency makes it plausible that he later obscured the distinctions that he had made at Auburn between his own and Irving's thought in the interest of claiming a fellow countryman (and one with Barth's imprimatur!) for

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<sup>23</sup> Habets, "Essence," xiii–xvii, xxii–xxiv (quotation from xiii, where Habets is summarizing a concern of David Ford's); for (partial) rebuttals, see xv–xvii, xxiii–xxiv.

<sup>24</sup> Van Kuiken, *Christ's Humanity*, 72–79. Not only was Mackintosh himself critical of Irving's Christology, but he served as faculty advisor to the similarly critical Paul Ewing Davies, "An Examination of the Views of Edward Irving concerning The Person and Work of Jesus Christ" (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1928).

<sup>25</sup> Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 161, quoting Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 2.47.

<sup>26</sup> Athanasius, *C. Ar.* 2.47 (*NPNF*<sup>2</sup> 4:374).

<sup>27</sup> Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 210 (emphasis mine). Cf. Thomas Boston, *Works* 1:402, [www.digitalpuritan.net](http://www.digitalpuritan.net).

the cause of “fallenness” Christology. If so, then Torrance’s preparation in 2001 of his Auburn lectures for publication would have reminded him of his differences with Irving.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Torrance himself moved beyond at least one of his early views. At Auburn he is unwilling to speak of Christ as assuming original sin; in his Edinburgh lectures, though, he does.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps Torrance likewise came to see his initial impression of Irving as mistaken.

There are some hints, though, that even in his later years, Torrance continued to harbor scruples about at least the pneumatological aspect of Irving’s theology. During the BBC interview, when Torrance speaks of Irving’s faith in a charismatically active “living God,” he echoes his previously-published evaluation of Pentecostalism as “a recovery of belief in *God*, not some remote inactive deity, but the mighty living God who acts.” Yet that publication had gone on to critique the “Pentecostalist concentration upon phenomena” and human experience to the eclipsing of God’s “transcendent reality.”<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere Torrance argues that, while God remains free to work miracles, “there is no appointed *programme* of anything like ‘faith healing’ or miraculous activity of a kindred sort.” The usual “miraculous signs” that God grants the Church are the sacraments.<sup>31</sup> This reserve explains why *Trinitarian Faith* only cites Smail’s Irving-indebted *Reflected Glory* once, on Christology — never on pneumatology or ecclesiology. It also explains why, when comparing the Torrance brothers’ coverage of Scottish theological history, we find much overlap in content with one striking difference: J. B.’s lecture on Irving’s Christology and pneumatology has no parallel in T. F.’s *Scottish Theology*, which

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<sup>28</sup> Torrance, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, ii–iii, notes that in preparing the Auburn lectures for publication, he has “tidied them up here and there, and sometimes a little rewriting had to be done” (ii). He describes these lectures (in a delightful rhyme) as “rather rough-hewn and jejune” (ii) but makes no explicit disavowals of their content. He only clarifies the lectures’ gender-exclusive language (ii–iii).

<sup>29</sup> Compare Torrance, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 122, 124–125, with Torrance, *Atonement*, 440. See Van Kuiken, *Christ’s Humanity*, 38.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, “The Church in the New Era of Scientific and Cosmological Change,” in Ray S. Anderson, ed., *Theological Foundations for Ministry: Selected Readings for a Theology of the Church in Ministry* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 774–776 (emphasis Torrance’s).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 149–150 (emphasis his).

breathes nary a word about Irving. And while devoting a full chapter to Irving's friend John McLeod Campbell, including a commendation of Campbell's "fallenness" Christology, T. F. makes no mention of the outbreak of charismata that accompanied Campbell's ministry and that Irving took as confirming his own Christology.<sup>32</sup>

Whatever Torrance may have thought of Irving's views, however intentionally or unconsciously he inclined toward or against them, the question remains: How close were the two Scots' positions? To answer this question, we must go beyond Torrance's comments on Irving and compare their Christologies for ourselves. What we find is both continuity and discontinuity.

## Caledonian Convergences

Irving's and Torrance's Christologies overlap at several points.<sup>33</sup> First, both of them distinguish between Christ's human nature as considered in isolation from his person and Christ's human nature as considered in union with his person. The former is "sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3); the latter, sinless. Irving explains,

Whether Christ's flesh is to be called *sinful* or *sinless*, ... both words are necessary to express its true character; sinful as he took it and had to deal with until the resurrection, sinless as he made it to become by

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<sup>32</sup> As recorded in Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 74.

<sup>33</sup> For the following comparisons and contrasts, I draw primarily on Torrance's Edinburgh lectures (due to their representative character and comprehensiveness; see Robert T. Walker, Editor's Foreword to Torrance, *Incarnation*, xi-xii) and on Irving's later writings. For a detailed argument against Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology*, and Elliott, "Edward Irving," that Irving's theology shifted considerably over the course of his ministry, see Tucker, "In Search of the Romantic Christ." I must respectfully dissent from the theory that Irving taught two conflicting Christologies, as proposed by Mark Rayburn Patterson, "Designing the Last Days: Edward Irving, The Albury Circle, and the Theology of *The Morning Watch*" (PhD thesis, King's College, London, 2001), <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/2928020/DX217304.pdf>. Patterson distinguishes between Irving's "Chalcedonian" Christology, in which Christ assumes fallen human nature, and Irving's "Docetic" millenarian Christology with its glorified Christ. Yet even Patterson admits that the ancient church would not have labeled such a view "Docetic" (154). His proposal presents as contradictory what orthodox Christology ever has held as complementary: Christ's state of humiliation and his state of exaltation. (The claim that premillennialism is Docetic surely would have surprised the anti-gnostic, pro-millennial Irenaeus of Lyons, as well as those church fathers who rejected "chiliasm" as too carnal an eschatology!) As for Irving's Chalcedonianism, see below.

taking it and holding it; sinful inasmuch as it is consubstantial with our flesh; sinless as it is his, in his person and by his person retained.<sup>34</sup>

While Irving stresses the distinction of the terms *substance/nature* and *person*, Torrance employs the *anhypostasia-enhypostasia* couplet: anhypostatically, "God the Son ... became one with us in the continuity of our adamic and fallen existence in such a way as to make contact with us in the very roots of our sinning being"; yet enhypostatically, he "was not himself a sinner.... [He] did not himself repeat our 'original sin' but vanquished it, and broke its continuity within our human nature."<sup>35</sup>

Second, in his very conception in Mary's womb, Christ's human nature became fully holy. According to Irving,

The substance of our Lord's human nature being a part of [Mary's] sinful substance, needed sanctification, and received it wholly and completely in the conception. And the sanctification which it received was not partial or incomplete, but wholly and perfectly received; *wholly* in respect to its totality, flesh, as well as soul, will, as well as reason, desires, affections, members, every thing which goes to complete human nature; *perfectly* as to degree, holy in no conventional sense, but really holy, holy as God is holy.<sup>36</sup>

Compare Torrance: "[O]ur very existence is involved in original sin — but the birth of Jesus was a birth of the holy Son into that condition which far from acquiescing in its sin, resists it, sanctifying what sin had corrupted, and uniting it again to the purity of God."<sup>37</sup> Or as his letter to the editor emphatically stated: "[I]n the very act

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<sup>34</sup> Edward Irving, *Christ's Holiness in Flesh, the Form, Fountain Head, and Assurance to Us of Holiness in Flesh* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1831), 93; see also Edward Irving, *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord's Human Nature* (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1830), vii: "[W]henever I attribute sinful properties and dispositions and inclinations to our Lord's human nature, I am speaking of it considered as apart from Him, in itself."

<sup>35</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 231–232. (Note: This and all further references to *Incarnation* refer to Torrance's published Edinburgh lectures, not to the volume he edited on the Nicene Creed.)

<sup>36</sup> Irving, *Christ's Holiness*, 78.

<sup>37</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 100.

of taking our fallen Adamic nature the Son of God redeemed, renewed and sanctified it AT THE SAME TIME."<sup>38</sup>

Third, this sanctification of sinful human nature is dynamic across the whole of Christ's earthly career. His human nature's hallowing *in utero* did not produce an immutable, stagnant sanctity; rather, it initiated a continuous conversion of sinful flesh into sinlessness that culminated at Calvary. This conversion is completed in every moment — there is no *gradual* replacement of sinfulness with holiness — but requires to be renewed every subsequent moment. Thus Irving writes of "Christ who, through his flesh, doth receive the gathering streams of all corruption, ... and yet is not overwhelmed with them, though sorely grieved, but ever as they come hath power to convert them into streams of living waters." Elsewhere he compares Christ's flesh to an animal bound on an altar for sacrifice: in this way, Christ kept his flesh's inclination toward sin in a state of impotence and remained utterly holy in his humanity.<sup>39</sup>

For his part, Torrance traces the rising "intensity of battle within the person of Christ" from his childhood struggles to advance in wisdom and grace (Luke 2:52) to the agonies of Gethsemane and Golgotha.<sup>40</sup> Throughout "the days of his flesh" (Hebrews 5:7), Christ "condemned sin in it; he overcame its temptations, resisted its downward drag in alienation from God, and converted it back in himself to obedience toward God, thus sanctifying it."<sup>41</sup> Torrance's capitalized wording in his letter to the editor, therefore, must be interpreted dynamically rather than statically: when he writes, "The only human nature which our Lord HAD, therefore,

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<sup>38</sup> Torrance, "Christ's human nature," 114.

<sup>39</sup> Irving, *Christ's Holiness*, 28 (quotation from this page), 37–44. On p. 91 he denies the proposition that "our Lord took our sinful nature, and by laborious operation upon it, was able *at length* to present it holy" (emphasis mine). See also Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine*, 66–67, where he seeks to distance himself from Bourignon's heresy that Christ's flesh *remained* sinfully corrupt.

<sup>40</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 106–107 (quotation from this page), 110–119. Rather than translating the *proekopten* of Luke 2:52 with the generic "grew," Torrance echoes Barth, *CD I/2*, 158, who draws on its etymology of beating out metal blow by blow.

<sup>41</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 205; cf. Torrance, *Atonement*, 69–70, 163, 216. For further on this "downward drag," see Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 56–57, with its echoes of Athanasius, *Inc.* 4–10.

was utterly pure and sinless," the "HAD" indicates the condition *into which Christ was continuously bringing* his human nature.<sup>42</sup>

Fourth, Christ's life of holiness in the flesh of sin was from first to last a life lived by the Holy Spirit. Irving never tires of repeating that it was by the power of the Holy Spirit that Christ counteracted the law of sin in his flesh.<sup>43</sup> While Torrance places less accent on this point, he does rehearse the Spirit's role in Christ's birth, baptism, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection.<sup>44</sup>

Fifth, Christ bore the sin of the world both *ontologically*, by being incarnate in fallen flesh, and *relationally*, through his sinless sympathy toward sinners.<sup>45</sup> Irving asks,

What made him capable of gathering within his heart the sins of all men? His holiness, his perfection of holy manhood.... Christ though Son of God was a perfect man, and therefore perfectly one with every other man; and every man's sin was his in the experience and feeling of it, just because he was himself holy and sinless. God was well pleased with him therefore, because thereby he felt as God intended man to feel, unity of substance with all other men, notwithstanding the distinctness of their personality.... There is not *my* flesh and *thy* flesh, but FLESH; there is not *my* reason and *thy* reason, but REASON.... The most holy man is the greatest sin-confessor; and a perfectly holy man,

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<sup>42</sup> See Torrance, *Incarnation*, 201: "But if it is our fallen humanity that [Christ] sinlessly assumed, in order to heal and sanctify it, not only through the act of assumption, but through a life of perfect obedience and a death in sacrifice, then we cannot state the doctrine of the hypostatic union statically but must state it *dynamically*, in terms of the whole course of Christ's life and obedience, from his birth to his resurrection" (emphasis his).

<sup>43</sup> Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine*, vii–viii, 1, 3–4, 67; *Christ's Holiness*, 8–10, 38–39, 42; and throughout Edward Irving, *The Day of Pentecost, Or, The Baptism with the Holy Ghost* (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1831).

<sup>44</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 125, 135–37.

<sup>45</sup> Torrance thinks these two together as "onto-relations." See Gary W. Deddo, "The Importance of the Personal in the Onto-relational Theology of Thomas F. Torrance," in Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 143–160.



that is Christ, is the confessor of all sin.<sup>46</sup>

Torrance likewise describes Christ's career from Jordan's banks to Calvary's hill as "enact[ing] in human flesh and human life, in his sinless solidarity with sinful man, the will of God to be one with man and to gather men and women into the heart of God." He was "pouring himself out in compassion and self-giving" even though his very compassion exposed the sin of others' hearts and aroused their hostility toward him.<sup>47</sup> He confessed our sin not only in word but in the whole action of his life and death.<sup>48</sup> He carried our fallen flesh through death into resurrection, and bore our rational mind in lifelong vicarious repentance (i.e. *metanoia*: change of mind) even into the hell of its ultimate alienation — *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* — and out again into reconciliation with God.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, Christ makes atonement by reconciling sinful human nature with God in himself through his life, death, and resurrection. Atonement is thus ontological, not merely forensic. Furthermore, its scope is unlimited, taking in all who share the same human nature as Christ assumed. The doctrine of universal salvation, though, remains false. On these points, too, Irving and Torrance concur.<sup>50</sup>

These half-dozen lines of consensus demark considerable common ground between Irving and Torrance on Christology. Yet their shared views do not tell the whole story. We turn now to probe their christological differences.

## **Chalcedonian Divergences**

Ninety-nine years and ten months after Irving's tragic death in December 1834, young Torrance began his Bachelor of Divinity studies at New College, Edinburgh.

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<sup>46</sup> Irving, *Christ's Holiness*, 61–62 (capitalization his).

<sup>47</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 106–113, 132–138, 142–156 (quotations from 107 and 112, respectively); *Atonement*, 151–152.

<sup>48</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 88–91.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 209–242, 437–447.

<sup>50</sup> Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine*, 88–95; Gavin Carlyle, ed., *The Collected Works of Edward Irving* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1864) 5:151–153, 164; Torrance, *Atonement*, esp. chs. 3–6.

There he met H. R. Mackintosh.<sup>51</sup> Although Mackintosh was a critic of Irving, the two had something in common: a kenotic Christology. Mackintosh found fault with the two-natures Christology enshrined in the Definition of Chalcedon and held that in the Incarnation, Christ had “transposed” his divine attributes into “the form of concentrated potency rather than of full actuality.”<sup>52</sup> For his own part, Irving seems to have been less than fully familiar with Chalcedon.<sup>53</sup> Although he detects in his opponents the heresies of Nestorianism and Eutychianism,<sup>54</sup> which Chalcedon ruled out, his own kenoticism runs afoul of the Chalcedonian claim that in Christ deity and humanity were united “without change” to *the divine nature*, not just to the human nature. Irving describes his understanding of kenosis in language that anticipates Mackintosh: the Incarnation was “the Son’s work of concentrating and humbling himself within the limited powers of a human will,” earthly knowledge,

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<sup>51</sup> McGrath, *T. F. Torrance*, 24 (who dates Torrance’s entry into New College to October 1934), 29–33.

<sup>52</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, second edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913; repr. 1920), 292–300 (critique of Chalcedon), 463–507 (kenoticism; quotations from 477). In Torrance, “Appreciation,” 80–81, we encounter another example of his flattening tendency when he claims that Mackintosh eschewed “metaphysical speculation” about kenosis. Mackintosh, *Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, vii–viii, explicitly describes his kenotic material as “more or less speculative” and involving a “metaphysic of faith.”

<sup>53</sup> In *Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine*, 33–37, Irving consults the Three Creeds (Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian) but not the Definition of Chalcedon. In his anonymously-published *The Opinions Circulating Concerning Our Lord’s Human Nature, Tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1830), 23, he remarks on the WCF’s line that Christ was “yet without sin” that this stipulation does not appear in the Three Creeds “because it never entered the mind of the primitive Church, that any one could suppose or assert a sinful substance to be taken into the divinity.” This stipulation, he says, was only introduced during the Reformation. Irving is oblivious to the fact that *Chalcedon* employed the line “without sin” (drawn from Hebrews 4:15). (For Irving’s admission of authorship of *Opinions Circulating*, see his *Christ’s Holiness*, xv–xvi.) Chalcedon — including its “without sin” — is discussed and quoted in an anonymous article, “On the Human Nature of Christ,” *The Morning Watch* (London: James Nisbet, 1830) vol. 1, 76, 82. Although Irving contributed to this journal, and although I, along with others, had previously taken him as this article’s author (see my *Christ’s Humanity*, 20, 183–188), his authorship of it has been effectively challenged now by Tucker, “In Search of the Romantic Christ,” 158–160 (a mild correction: Tucker incorrectly labels “we” and “our” language as “second person plural” rather than first person plural).

<sup>54</sup> Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine*, 28, 44–45.

bodily presence, and creaturely ability so that he could no longer act beyond their confines.<sup>55</sup>

By contrast, Torrance constructively affirms Chalcedon and denies kenoticism. Already at Auburn, he obliquely critiqued Mackintosh, stating that “the idea of a ‘kenosis’ or ‘emptying’ of attributes, or even a condensation or concentration into essence-form of the Divine capacities or properties, is irrelevant to the situation.”<sup>56</sup> By the time of his Edinburgh lectures and his forays into the dialogue between the natural and theological sciences, he could appeal to a “relational” rather than “receptacle” notion of space to support the traditional patristic and Reformed stance that the Son’s divine nature suffered no diminution when he became flesh.<sup>57</sup>

Irving’s kenoticism contributes to a distinction-driven account of the Trinity’s action in Christ’s career. Neither his sinlessness nor his supernatural knowledge and deeds were due to the Son’s own divine power, which remained quiescent across his earthly life. The hypostatic union itself did not sanctify his flesh, for that would imply a Monophysite mixing together of deity and humanity. Rather, in his virginal conception, the Holy Spirit alone sanctified the nature assumed from his mother so that it existed in a regenerate condition. Thereafter, his divine personhood manifested itself in the perfect faith he ever expressed within his humanity. By that faith he wielded the Spirit’s enablement as a man — not as God — to maintain lifelong sinlessness. At his baptism the Spirit empowered him to do miracles and access heavenly wisdom, and at the same time he was indwelt by his Father. The Spirit’s empowering and the Father’s indwelling lasted until Gethsemane, at which time the Father and the Spirit withdrew so that the Son experienced his sufferings and death alone. Then the Spirit returned to raise him from the dead and exalt him

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<sup>55</sup> Irving, *Day of Pentecost*, 70 (quotation from this page), 74–75, 62, 64–65. For further on Irving’s kenoticism, see Dorries, *Edward Irving’s Incarnational Christology*, 88–97.

<sup>56</sup> Torrance, *Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 108–115 (quotation from 112).

<sup>57</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 74–76 (kenosis), 199–210 (Chalcedon), 216–221 (the so-called *Extra Calvinisticum* and notions of space); cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

to the Father's glory.<sup>58</sup> Irving's mentor Coleridge fretted that such a partitive account amounted to tritheism.<sup>59</sup>

Underlying Irving's kenoticism-*cum*-Spirit Christology is a "contrastive/competitive" metaphysic in which God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and Christ's humanity each have individual "places" and powers that exist on the same metaphysical plane and that must be coordinated in a zero-sum game of give and take. This outlook stands starkly at odds with that of the premodern church, not least Chalcedon.<sup>60</sup> Irving was a nineteenth-century heir to the seventeenth century's "domestication of transcendence" that broke from previous generations by treating God as but one object among others in the universe.<sup>61</sup>

Torrance, on the other hand, benefitted from the Barthian revolution in theology that regained God's wholly-otherness, as well as the Einsteinian revolution in natural science that replaced atomistic analysis with field theory.<sup>62</sup> Thus his trinitarianism refreshes patristic doctrines of divine simplicity,<sup>63</sup> noncontrastive transcendence, immutability, mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*), and inseparable

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<sup>58</sup> Irving, *Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine*, vii–viii, 1–4, 31; *Christ's Holiness*, 8–10, 38–42; *Day of Pentecost*, 16–20, 26–29, 64–71, 74–76, 90.

<sup>59</sup> Elliott, "Edward Irving," 146, 149–150, 160, citing H. J. Jackson and G. Whalley, eds., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Marginalia* (London: Routledge, 1992) vol. 3, 17, 41–43, and Carl Woodring, ed., *Table Talk* (London: Routledge, 1990) vol. 1, 127–128, respectively.

<sup>60</sup> Chris E. W. Green, "Why Did God Become a Man of the Spirit? Toward a Wesleyan Pentecostal Spirit-Christology," in Jason E. Vickers and Jerome Van Kuiken, gen. eds., *Methodist Christology: From the Wesleys to the Twenty-First Century* (Nashville: Wesley's Foundery Books, 2020), 179–191 (quotation from 179). Green detects this metaphysical presupposition in multiple contemporary Spirit Christologies.

<sup>61</sup> William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

<sup>62</sup> On the latter's relation to Torrance's thought, see Ritchie, *T. F. Torrance*, 7, 86–89.

<sup>63</sup> Although divine simplicity has no entry in the index of Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons*, second edition (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), pp. 130, 236 briefly affirm the doctrine. Steve Holmes has argued that Torrance typically uses the *homoousion* to do the same work as the doctrine of divine simplicity. See Stephen R. Holmes, "Simplicity in Fourth-century Nicene Theology and T. F. Torrance's *Homoousion*," keynote presentation to the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship annual meeting, Nov. 19, 2021, available at <https://tftorrance.org/meetings/>. Cf. Sang Hoon Lee, "The Doctrine of Divine Simplicity in T.F. Torrance's Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 23.2 (2021), 198–214; doi:10.1111/ijst.12478.

operations (patterned prepositionally: all things are *from* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Spirit). Everything the Incarnate Son does and suffers — including enduring crucifixion — he does and suffers divinely as well as humanly, in such full communion of being and act with the Father and the Spirit as to avoid any tritheistic division of labor.<sup>64</sup> When he is born as an infant, he simultaneously reigns on heaven's throne. If he receives the Holy Spirit as a man, he does so out of the eternal communion with the Spirit that he enjoys as God. While the Father raises him from the dead, he also has authority to take up his own life again.<sup>65</sup> Far from seeing the Incarnation as a kenotic hiatus from the Son's habitual divine actions and relations, Torrance interprets it through a Chalcedonian prism as the paradigm for understanding the general relationship between God and the cosmos.<sup>66</sup>

Irving's expositions of his doctrines of Christ and the Spirit had an intensely pastoral intent: to motivate his parishioners to live up to the full benefits offered by the gospel. At the ecclesiastical trial that ended with his excommunication, Irving expressed this point eloquently, exclaiming, "This is no question of scholastic theology. I speak for the sanctification of men. I wish my flock to be holy; and, unless the Lord Jesus has contended with sin, as they are commanded to do, how can they be holy when they follow Him? Can I ask the people to do or suffer more than He did?"<sup>67</sup> In his writings, Irving holds Christ up as an example for Christians to follow — and not simply in sinlessness within sinful flesh.<sup>68</sup> The anointing of the Spirit that enabled Christ as a mortal man to resist sin also gifted him to perform miracles and speak prophetic truth. All those who are baptized with the same Spirit

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<sup>64</sup> Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, esp. 161, 196–199, 215–216, and the whole of ch. 9. Torrance explicitly states that Christ was "crucified in unbroken oneness with the Father and the Spirit" and applauds Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God* for recognizing this truth, then adds, "but his somewhat tritheistic understanding of the unity, rather than the oneness, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in spite of what he intends, damages this insight" (247, incl. n.39).

<sup>65</sup> Torrance, *Incarnation*, 216–219, 125; *Atonement*, 213–218, respectively.

<sup>66</sup> Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 220–221, thereby setting the stage for his discussions of providence (221–234) and divine immutability and impassibility (235–256).

<sup>67</sup> Irving's defense at his trial (Mar. 13, 1833), in [Margaret] Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving*, second revised edition (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862) vol. 2, 346.

<sup>68</sup> Christ as an example for Christians' sanctification is the theme of Irving, *Christ's Holiness*.

should imitate all Christ's deeds and words, including his miracle working and "perpetual infallibility of thought, speech, and behaviour"!<sup>69</sup> Once again, the contrastive metaphysic is at play in a univocal account of the relationship between Christ and Christians: because both occupy the same plane of being, with no recourse to Christ's divine nature to give him any special advantage, his experience *can* and so *ought to* be entirely imitable by us.

Torrance's noncontrastive metaphysic delivers a different understanding of the relationship of believers to their Savior. In an article published two years after Auburn, Torrance draws parallels between the christological heresies excluded by Chalcedon and their cognate anthropological or soteriological heresies. Thus Docetism, for instance, compares to theological determinism by undermining the reality of human agency in Christ and Christians, respectively. Likewise, Nestorianism and synergism both falsely posit a divine-human roughly equal partnership. The correlate to anthropocentric Ebionism is Pelagianism.<sup>70</sup> Since Torrance at Auburn had scored Irving's Christology as "almost ... Ebionite," the corollary would be that Irving's expectations of the Christian life overstress believers' capability and responsibility to wield the Spirit's power to achieve sinlessness, miracles, and infallibility. Already above we noted Torrance's nervousness about the charismata and his denial of the normativity of wonderworking. So too would he eschew any claims of Christian sinlessness or infallibility, for the whole Christian life is one of moral and mental repentance.<sup>71</sup> Rather than focusing on our own spiritual efforts or experiences (even those we most attribute to the Holy Spirit's activity), Torrance urges us to keep our attention on Christ's radically substitutionary-representative role: in his vicarious humanity, he fully embodies not only God's gracious initiative toward us but our response to God. We find sinlessness, infallibility, and miraculous power in him, not in ourselves. Certainly, the Spirit actualizes Christ's benefits within us, but not insofar as we imitate Christ as an external exemplar to be perfectly copied; instead, we

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<sup>69</sup> This is the burden of Irving, *Day of Pentecost* (quotation from 54; on the following page, Irving rejects the exclusivity of papal infallibility: the gift of infallibility is for all Christians).

<sup>70</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "Predestination in Christ," *Evangelical Quarterly* 13 (1941), 129–131.

<sup>71</sup> For an extended exploration of intellectual repentance and believers' fallible yet genuine sharing in the "mind of Christ," see the epilogue to Torrance, *Atonement*, 437–447.

participate in Christ as internally incorporated — with all our shortcomings — into his already-perfected life.<sup>72</sup>

In sum, Torrance's later statements about Irving are more positive than his initial assessment at Auburn, accenting the numerous points of agreement between their Christologies. Nevertheless, young Torrance's Auburn complaint at Irving's bracketing off of Christ's divine nature from both his humanity and the Holy Spirit flags up enduring metaphysical differences between the two theologians. The final section of this essay will suggest some implications of our findings for constructive theological work.

### **Theology in Spirited Reconstruction**

Mary Campbell of Gareloch, Scotland, was an invalid who encountered the teaching of Irving and his associates. Irving describes its effect on her:

She came to see ... that all the works of Christ were done by the man anointed with the Holy Ghost, and not by the God mixing himself up with the man.... [A]nd the end of the whole mystery of his incarnation is to shew unto mortal men what every one of them, through faith in his name, shall be able to perform.... She straitway argued, if Jesus as a man in my nature thus spake and thus performed mighty works by the Holy Ghost, which he even promiseth to me, then ought I in the same nature, by the same Spirit, to do likewise "the works which he did, and greater works than these."<sup>73</sup>

On March 28, 1830, she spoke in tongues and, soon after, forsook her sickbed. So began a charismatic revival of prophecy, tongues, and healings in western Scotland that by the following year had spread south to Irving's own London church.<sup>74</sup> Mary

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, second edition (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmer & Howard, 1992), ch. 4, gives a pithy synopsis of this point. See also Christian D. Kettler, "'Jesus Christ is Our Human Response to God': Divine and Human Agency in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance," *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, 207–221.

<sup>73</sup> Dorries, *Edward Irving's Incarnational Christology*, 45, quoting Edward Irving, "Facts Connected With Recent Manifestations of Spiritual Gifts," *Fraser's Magazine* (Jan. 1832), 757.

<sup>74</sup> Patterson, "Designing the Last Days," 175–181.

Campbell's testimonial captures the twin-sided attraction of Irving's doctrine of Christ: on the one hand, comfort that he has become just like us in our weakness; on the other hand, encouragement that we can become just like him in his power.

If a positive feature of Irving's view is its existential relevance and a negative is its almost-Ebionism, then Torrance's teaching reverses these polarities with its robustly Chalcedonian Christology and its "pneumatological Docetism." Simeon Zahl uses this phrase to describe the "*complacency with theological abstractions*" in Torrance's theology, which expounds at length the objective doctrinal content of the Christian faith but says next to nothing about the Spirit-enabled experiential outworking of these doctrines. Zahl insists that good theology has "affective salience" — it impacts how we feel and live.<sup>75</sup>

In responding to Zahl, let us start with a caveat: Asking how a doctrine makes us feel or behave is insufficient to determine its truth-value. Consider Mary Campbell's experience, which she and her friends, Irving himself, and some present-day Pentecostals have seen as confirming Irving's doctrine. Yet 1830 also saw an American named Joseph Smith establish the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Early Mormonism, too, featured glossolalia and prophecy,<sup>76</sup> plus a "fallenness" Christology coupled with a full-bloomed tritheism (indeed, polytheism) beyond anything Coleridge scented in Irving.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, that same year French visionary Catherine Labouré received visitations from the Blessed Virgin that launched the nineteenth-century "Age of Mary" and the dogma of the

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<sup>75</sup> Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); quotations from pp. 99, 70 (emphasis his), and 4, respectively.

<sup>76</sup> Tucker, "In Search of the Romantic Christ," 32–34, notes several parallels between Irvingism and Mormonism, as well as another, slightly later American development: Adventism.

<sup>77</sup> Brigham Young, "Attention and Reflection Necessary to An Increase of Knowledge — Self-Control — Unity of the Godhead and of the People of God," discourse delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, Nov. 29, 1857, available at *Journal of Discourses* vol. 6, 93–101, <http://jod.mrm.org/6/93>. Note Young's univocal treatment of unity among believers and within the Trinity. Cf. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel. Vol. 1, The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chs. 8–16, 21.



Immaculate Conception — a dogma antithetical to Irving’s Christology,<sup>78</sup> yet one later confirmed by visions and healings at Lourdes.<sup>79</sup> Marianism, Mormonism, and Irvingism each could appeal to supporting supernatural phenomena that excited emotion and motivated piety, and each still has affective salience for millions of adherents,<sup>80</sup> but the three movements hold apparently incompatible doctrines.<sup>81</sup>

While it is not the case that whatever has affective salience is sound doctrine, the converse surely is true: whatever is sound doctrine has affective salience. If “the unassumed is the unhealed,” then the gospel implicates us holistically. Here further context from Torrance could moderate Zahl’s criticism. Recall the quotation at the head of this essay. Barth’s “fallenness” Christology had profound affective salience for young Torrance when first he read of it: “Overwhelmed ..., I fell to the ground on my knees trembling in awe and wonder.”<sup>82</sup> In assigning the same passage to his own students, presumably he hoped they would feel likewise. Torrance’s teaching itself has had a similar effect on some:

Often in my study of Torrance’s work I have found myself on my knees *coram deo* lost in wonder, praise and thanksgiving to the glorious Triune God, overwhelmed by the power and grandeur of the Gospel. I find myself personally, spiritually and theologically transformed.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Carlyle, *Collected Works* vol. 1, 589; Irving, *Christ’s Holiness*, 78. Torrance, too, presents it as diametrically opposed to his Christology: see Torrance, “Christ’s human nature,” 114.

<sup>79</sup> See the introduction to Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London: Penguin, 1999).

<sup>80</sup> Tucker, “In Search of the Romantic Christ,” 6, notes that an offshoot of the Catholic Apostolic Church that formed out of Irving’s ministry now has over ten million members.

<sup>81</sup> Note, though, that Roman Catholic charismatic Thomas G. Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), attempts to affirm both a “fallenness” Christology and the Immaculate Conception. Likewise, Stephen H. Webb sought in multiple books to bridge the divide between Mormonism and non-LDS Christianity, especially his own Catholicism.

<sup>82</sup> This testimonial appears in Torrance’s experientially-rich epilogue to *Atonement*, 441–442. Zahl ignores this material while mining *Atonement* for theological abstractions: see *Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, 96, 98–99.

<sup>83</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, untitled recollection, *Participatio* 1 (2009), 18, <https://tftorrance.org/journal/v1/participatio-2009-v1-04-Colyer-15-19.pdf>.

.. .

It was clear that while academic, hugely stimulating and informative, [Torrance's] lectures did not separate mind and heart, or intellect and faith. The short prayer at the beginning of the class, when "TFT" closed his eyes really tightly ... was invariably a beautiful and succinct summary of the whole lecture.<sup>84</sup>

Zahl misses counterevidence from the works of Torrance's from which he lifts damning abstractions. For instance, he showcases a quotation from *Trinitarian Faith's* foreword to illustrate Torrance's dearth of specifics on how the Trinity impacts Christian life individually and corporately.<sup>85</sup> Yet the immediate context of the line Zahl quotes is a discussion in affectively-charged language of how the Holy Spirit "confronts us with the ineffability and sublime majesty of God ... and acts upon us in a quiet and gentle self-effacing way" so that "we are brought near to God and are given to share in his divine life, light and love." Torrance then specifies that this sharing means membership in the church, which is characterized by the Nicene marks of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.<sup>86</sup> In the chapter that this section of the foreword previews, Torrance promotes the following affects, actions, and agents: "reverence for the Holy Scriptures"; exemplary church fathers who were "deeply moved" by God's "unrestricted majesty"; prayer and worship; preserving "the bond of peace" by avoiding heresies and schisms and by holding the church in "awe and veneration" rather than contempt; being "directed away from ourselves" toward Christ in baptism; declining to dishonor God through rebaptism; church leaders as servants, not sovereigns; evangelism of all people in all places; and loss of fear of death through hope in the "triumphant reality" of resurrection.<sup>87</sup> All this comes near the end of a book whose first chapter, "Faith and Godliness," sets the tone for the rest. Earlier in the foreword from which Zahl selectively quotes, Torrance had summarized this first chapter's theme: the

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<sup>84</sup> Walker, Editor's Foreword to Torrance, *Incarnation*, [x]. See Torrance, *Atonement*, 451, for fragments of two such prayers.

<sup>85</sup> Zahl, *Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, 71–72, quoting Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 9–10.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 247, 249–251, 273, 282, 284–300.

importance of reverence, worship, “passionate commitment,” and “listening obedience” for doing theology rightly.<sup>88</sup> Affects and praxis are not wholly absent from Torrance’s thought, but they need more scholarly attention.<sup>89</sup>

Whatever nuance Zahl’s rebuke requires, though, even Torrance’s sympathizers often admit his imbalance and seek to redress it.<sup>90</sup> For instance, Christian Kettler has explored the relationship of Christ’s vicarious humanity to the affects of faith, doubt, joy, despair, and love.<sup>91</sup> Alister McGrath has supplemented Torrance’s theology of objective space and time with a theology of subjectively meaningful *place* and *history*.<sup>92</sup> Others’ efforts have the additional benefit of narrowing the gap between Torrance and Irving. Thomas Noble from the Wesleyan tradition and Alexandra Radcliff from the Pentecostal-charismatic tradition have

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>89</sup> For recent steps toward that goal, see E. Jerome Van Kuiken, “‘Not I, but Christ’: Thomas F. Torrance on the Christian Life” and Myk Habets, “*Theologia Is Eusebeia*: Thomas F. Torrance’s Church Homiletics,” *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, 243–257, 259–276, respectively; Kevin J. Navarro, *Trinitarian Doxology: T. F. and J. B. Torrance’s Theology of Worship as Participation by the Spirit in the Son’s Communion with the Father* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020); Joseph H. Sherrard, *T. F. Torrance as Missional Theologian: The Ascended Christ and the Ministry of the Church*, New Explorations in Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021).

<sup>90</sup> For documentation, see Van Kuiken, “‘Not I,’” 253, 256–257; cf. Sherrard, *T. F. Torrance as Missional Theologian*, 189, 221–225.

<sup>91</sup> Christian D. Kettler, *The God Who Believes: Faith, Doubt, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2005); *The God Who Rejoices: Joy, Despair, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010); *The God Who Loves and is Loved: The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Response of Love* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020).

<sup>92</sup> Alister McGrath, “Place, history and incarnation: On the subjective aspects of christology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 75.2 (2022), 137–147; <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930622000278>. McGrath accepts Zahl’s critique of Torrance and seeks to supplement Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969, 1997) by attending to the land and history of Israel. McGrath is correct that Torrance’s book neglects these. Yet the sequel, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, does reflect on Israel’s history and literature (ch. 1) as well as the key events in Christ’s personal history (chs. 2–8). Likewise, Torrance’s Edinburgh lectures locate *Space, Time and Incarnation*’s material within extensive coverage of Christ’s personal history and its background in Israel’s history: see Torrance, *Incarnation*, 216–221, within the context of the lectures as a whole.

offered christologically-rooted optimistic accounts of subjective sanctification.<sup>93</sup> “Evangelical Calvinist” Myk Habets has contributed to the flourishing field of Spirit Christology.<sup>94</sup> Such efforts incorporate into Torrancean theology Irving’s motifs of Christian holiness, the charismata, and Christ’s reliance on the Spirit without succumbing to a contrastive/competitive metaphysic and its leanings toward Ebionism, tritheism, and Pelagianism.<sup>95</sup>

Lastly, given how this essay has revised my former study of Torrance’s reception of Irving, does that study’s constructive proposal now need revision, too? My proposal aimed to bring a measure of resolution to the christological debate between “fallenness” and “unfallenness” partisans by unearthing the fourfold common ground shared by many of them beneath terminological differences: 1. Humanity outside of Christ exists under all the effects of the Fall, both moral (original sin) and amoral (temptation, suffering, mortality).<sup>96</sup> 2. At Christ’s conception, his human nature was freed from the power of sin. 3. Throughout Christ’s life on earth, he suffered the amoral effects of the Fall but 4. not its moral effects, for he remained wholly sinless.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Thomas A. Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People: The Theology of Christian Perfecting* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013); Alexandra S. Radcliff, *The Claim of Humanity in Christ: Salvation and Sanctification in the Theology of T. F. and J. B. Torrance*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 222 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016). One also might list Thomas Smail as synthesizing Torrancean and Pentecostal-charismatic elements, though he has been faulted for misunderstanding Torrance. See the analyses of Smail’s *The Giving Gift: The Holy Spirit in Person* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), 109–112 in Christian D. Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 139–141, and Marty Folsom’s article in this volume of *Participatio*.

<sup>94</sup> E.g., Myk Habets, *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 129 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010); “The Fallen Humanity of Christ: A Pneumatological Clarification of the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance,” *Participatio* 5 (2015), 18–44. For a recent state-of-the-field survey, see Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., *T&T Clark Introduction to Spirit Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2022).

<sup>95</sup> Note again the plea of Green, “Why Did God,” for a noncontrastive Spirit Christology.

<sup>96</sup> These latter are “amoral” in the sense that they do not automatically determine the moral state of the one experiencing them (to be tempted or feel pain is distinct from sinning).

<sup>97</sup> Van Kuiken, *Christ’s Humanity*, 165–166. The numbered points above reflect the more recent version of my proposal put forward in Jerome Van Kuiken, “Sinless Savior in Fallen Flesh? Toward Clarifying and Closing the Debate,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64.2 (2021), 327–340; see 339.

I believe that the possibility of consensus between the two camps still stands provided they are open to a *dynamic* reading of Points 2–4. That is, as described earlier, Christ’s conception may be seen as initiating a lifelong continuous conversion of his human nature from vicarious sinfulness to sinlessness that culminated in his death and resurrection. Such a reading fits well with Barth’s actualism,<sup>98</sup> which Torrance echoes and Irving foreshadows. It clarifies the continuity Torrance finds between himself and prior Scottish theologians — even adherents of the Westminster tradition.<sup>99</sup> It coheres with evangelicals’ traditional emphasis on Calvary rather than Bethlehem as the crux of God’s dealing with sin through Christ.<sup>100</sup> May it evoke in those who embrace it the same doxological response as Torrance’s at Basel! And may Irving, the “Angel of Regent Square,” remind us in a chastened manner of the Spirit’s role in Points 2–4 and their implications for Christian living. If so, then both Torrance’s and our own wrestling with him will end in a blessing.

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<sup>98</sup> George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 30–32.

<sup>99</sup> That is, Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, interprets their Christologies from within his dynamic frame of reference.

<sup>100</sup> See the analysis and proposal put forth by Ritchie, *T. F. Torrance*.



**T. F. TORRANCE AND T. A. SMAIL:**

**Interpreting the Spirit for Guidance and Correction in the Church**

**Marty Folsom, Ph.D.**

**Professor of Theology, Shiloh University**

drtrinity@comcast.net

**Abstract:** *This exploratory article discusses the theological relation of Thomas A. Smail and Thomas F. Torrance for developing a proper understanding of the Holy Spirit to inform and guide the life of the Church and believers. This will extend to Smail's corrective work in Pentecostal and charismatic churches that depart from a sound theology in thought and practice. Smail uniquely contributes to Torrance studies in his thoughtful advocacy for and correction of those who pursue a life in the Spirit.*

## **Introduction**

The Holy Spirit is often acknowledged as the divine person who brings to fruition God's presence and work in our lives. Yet for many, the Spirit is the missing or neglected person of the Trinity. For others, the Spirit is dangerous. As critiqued by Smail, and in my own experience, Pentecostals and charismatics often have a tarnished understanding of the Spirit as one who serves human desires with supernatural power that misses the loving freedom of God, replaced with some human vision of success. We need to stay true to the revelation of the triune God,

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and faithful to the Spirit's intention in the actuality of our life and worship, which should not be separated.

T. F. Torrance and T. A. Smail are important to consider for this conversation. Many consider Torrance the greatest English-speaking trinitarian theologian of the twentieth century, laying a foundation for the Church's understanding of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> T. A. Smail helpfully developed Torrance's trinitarian thought, building as he engaged the charismatic movement and gained insights regarding how theology guides and corrects.<sup>2</sup> My intent in this article is not to compare and contrast their work, but to show their complementary work in serving the Church when thinking and acting with regard to the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> I hope to argue that Torrance and Smail, when read together, complement each other and provide the implications of theology for practice. I bring their scattered insights into an ordered presentation to aid in further development and clarification.

Our discussion begins by tracing the common understanding of Torrance and Smail on the Spirit. Then we will engage the problems they identify in inadequate theologies of the Spirit, concluding with corrective guidance for a proper dynamic

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<sup>1</sup> See T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), chapter 6, "The Eternal Spirit," 191-251; *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965), chapter 12, "Spiritus Creator: A consideration of the teaching of St. Athanasius and Basil," and chapter 13, "The Relevance of the Doctrine of the Spirit for Ecumenical Theology." See also Elmer Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), chapter 6, "The Holy Spirit," 211-41, and "Thomas F. Torrance on the Holy Spirit" in *Word & World* 23, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>2</sup> Smail recounts, "The theology of Karl Barth and T. F. Torrance that had shaped me then, and is still very important to me, tended to reinforce my own suspicions and disinclinations about more Pentecostal responses to the gospel." - T. A. Smail, "A Renewal Recalled," in *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: Gospel and Culture, 1995), 8. Published in the U.S. as *The Love of Power or the Power of Love* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Torrance gives more *insight* on a *theology* of the Spirit than Smail, but he does point to implications for the life of the Spirit in the Church. See Gary Deddo, "The Holy Spirit in T. F. Torrance's Theology," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialog with T. F. Torrance*, ed. Elmer Colyer (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001). In the section, "T. F. Torrance Responds," Torrance says, "... one should not expect the Spirit to have some kind of autonomous working. That is indeed the danger point where serious problems arise in many charismatic movements, when an emphasis on the Holy Spirit incompatible with the coinherent nature of the activity of the Triune God can become unbiblical and heretical" (312).



theological praxis for the Church. The aim is to provide clarity and theological continuity for understanding God's gifting and ongoing work of the Spirit in the Church and world.

T. F. Torrance, profound as he is in the foundations, leaves much to be explored for the Church's understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He does not always play out implications for the guidance and correction of the Church. His methodologically constructive articulation points to correctives for the conversation rather than developing them as he did in his christological works. T. A. Smail studied with Torrance at New College, Edinburgh, 1949-52,<sup>4</sup> and went on to be a leading figure in the charismatic movement in the UK. Smail engages charismatics as a corrective guide, not helping a movement looking for a theology, but recognizing it as seriously in need of one.<sup>5</sup> This combination leads to a Torrance-Smail framework that intends to gather insights with deep roots and fruitful outcomes to further the conversation as a consolidated theological praxis.<sup>6</sup>

## **Theologians in Service of God and the Church**

We will begin with the unique, relational, trinitarian theology that this pair of theologians holds in common. Torrance and Smail both assert that theology may not begin with experience or gifts of the Spirit. Proper theology must begin with a "classical trinitarian theology that has its roots in the New Testament and that centres in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the only Son of the Father as the focal point of all creation and recreation."<sup>7</sup>

A proper theology for renewal must be expressed in a community that focuses on the cross and resurrection of the Son who continues to work in us and

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<sup>4</sup> David Torrance confirms that Tom Smail was one year ahead of him at New College, therefore was there under TF 1949-52, and that he subsequently went to study with Barth 1952-53 (personal correspondence with Jock Stein 12 Dec. 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 49.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Purves, *The Triune God and the Charismatic Movement* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 156-75, explores at length the influence of Torrance on the charismatic movement in Scotland. Purves goes on in the next chapter, pp. 176-90, to discuss Smail. This sequence is not an accident, as he discusses on pp. 203-7.

<sup>7</sup> T. A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 185.

through us by his Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Without community, we collapse into individualism as each contorts the Spirit to fit their own individual needs and desires. Smail asserts we need a Paschal model of renewal that begins with the Cross and works its way out as a single movement of the Father, through the Cross of Christ, and poured out on the Church at Pentecost as a unified movement of God's grace.<sup>9</sup>

The well-expressed spiritual life that follows from the work of the Spirit is evidenced by a healthy relationship with God.<sup>10</sup> When the Spirit of Christ indwells Jesus' body, a wholeness follows. Creativity flows. It renews and releases those in captivity through participation in the life of God, who transforms the whole life of humans in every aspect.

The work of theology brings humans into concert with the present and acting God. Therefore, as Smail saw through his encounters, charismatic renewal cannot be about humans in acts of self-perfection or empowerment. Renewal is about relationships.<sup>11</sup> But these relationships are anchored in the triune God. These become elastic and dynamic expressions that are never disconnected. They produce freedom, engaging the present life of humans within a life-giving attachment to the gracious activity of God.<sup>12</sup>

Smail's most memorable experience of the Spirit was at a neo-Pentecostal conference where he spoke in tongues. An interpretation was given by a young woman unknown to him, saying, "There is no way to Pentecost except by Calvary; the Spirit is given from the Cross."<sup>13</sup> This theme runs through all of Smail's works. The Spirit, by whom Jesus is conceived, fulfills his ministry, is resurrected, and ascends, is still the one at work in Jesus' Church to bring it to loving obedience,

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<sup>8</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 60.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> T. A. Smail, *Reflected Glory: The Spirit in Christ and Christians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), 65.

<sup>11</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 109.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 160

<sup>13</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 104.

indwelling his people to continue the work of the Father through the Son to the glory of God.<sup>14</sup>

## **The Spirit and the Trinity – God’s Eternal Life for the Church**

The Holy Spirit must be understood within the triune life of God. Along with Torrance, Smail roots his thinking on the Holy Spirit in the developing foundations of Scripture<sup>15</sup> and the early church in its trinitarian dynamics.<sup>16</sup> Critical issues such as the *homoousion* of the Spirit, acknowledging full divinity of the Spirit, and the *filioque*, which could appear to subordinate the Spirit, underscore that misunderstanding and diminishment of the Spirit in the life of the Trinity can damage our understanding of and relationship with the Living God. With Torrance and Smail, we are on the road to healing the tensions of the great schism. Both call for a renewal of the mutual and interdependent life of the persons of the Trinity and their proper relations.<sup>17</sup>

In the Reformation era, Calvin reemphasized the personal action of the Holy Spirit. The life of faith is facilitated by the Spirit in joining us to Christ. This role of connecting in personal participation in the life of faith, the reading of Scripture, and union with Christ, informs both Torrance and Smail as the evangelical faith revives the present work of the whole triune God in a responsive life.<sup>18</sup>

For Torrance and Smail, theology becomes a map derived from divine reality. It is a tool that allows one to move within the area one is traveling. Rather than merely talking about God, we must enter into a knowing that brings us to indwell the reality that has come to us in Christ, and in an ongoing manner, through the

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<sup>14</sup> T. A. Smail, *The Giving Gift: The Holy Spirit in Person* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 106.

<sup>15</sup> T. A. Smail, "The Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity," in *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism*, ed. Christopher R. Seitz (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 150-51.

<sup>16</sup> T. A. Smail, "Holy Spirit," in *The New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, second edition, eds. Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, and T. A. Noble (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016), 421-3.

<sup>17</sup> We do not have space to discuss the many issues of the filioque clause, but see Smail, "The Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity," in *Nicene Christianity*, 154-65 for Smail's fullest engagement.

<sup>18</sup> Smail, *ibid.*, 423.

Spirit.<sup>19</sup> The Spirit becomes the personal compass, orienting us to follow the reality of Jesus, aligned with the movement of God.

Any discussion of the Spirit must be explored within an implicit trinitarian context.<sup>20</sup> We cannot relate to the Father separately from the Son, just as we cannot know the Spirit without knowing the Son and the Father. All our knowledge of each of the triune persons is irreducibly tied to the others. Through the Bible, we become attentive to the witness of all that is given in personal revelation that does not transmit information but speaks to us as persons.<sup>21</sup> Granted, each person is a different expression from the other two, revealing a distinctive and complementary fashioning within the unitary life of God. But the Spirit most distinctly directs us away from himself to the Father and Son, drawing us to participate in knowing and being known within the triune life without drawing attention to himself.<sup>22</sup>

Each person within the Trinity is an agent to be encountered.<sup>23</sup> There are no separated centers of consciousness, only an integrated life of loving from the divine will. Each acts in their own particular way, speaking and acting their unique fulfillment of the loving freedom of God in sharing one will.

Torrance writes his trinitarian theological manifestoes to include all three persons within one text. He also selects the person and work of Christ as a primary focus for many works in his corpus. Smail, on the other hand, writes on each of the persons in distinct discussions within a trinitarian conversation. Torrance works from the unity of the Trinity and plays out the trinitarian dimensions, but Smail is more inclined to begin with each person of the Trinity and explore them in the light of their relations from that vantage point. Neither approach is to be preferred, but his approach has led Smail to be more expansive in his exploration of the Spirit, which now informs our discussion.

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<sup>19</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 51.

<sup>20</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>23</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 50.

Smail affirms that good doctrine "is bound to have the most direct pastoral and spiritual implications."<sup>24</sup> He affirms that the Spirit must be seen as fully and uniquely personal, which informs our personal life. A person is defined as "One who reveals himself as the source and centre of the kind of actions and relationships that, by analogy with ordinary human experience, we recognize as personal."<sup>25</sup> The question of what we mean by being and acting like a person will be engaged in all that follows. But the Spirit is certainly not a thing or merely the relation between persons.<sup>26</sup>

Doctrine must be fully relational to reflect a trinitarian engagement. There cannot be a mere "I-Thou" between the trinitarian persons; they must resonate with a shared life of "I-Thou-We."<sup>27</sup> It must have unity, particularity, and distinctions that flow from the union of the three. From the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, we are brought to share in this life of personal participation. Revelation is necessary, but the same God brings us into a responsive experience of communion as he fulfills reconciliation, bringing us to share his redeeming life.

Three persons provide an exact, and yet unique, self-giving. An inadequate but helpful illustration suggests the image of a clipboard on a computer. An original text communicates (the Father). One may create an exact copy on the clipboard (the Son), and then paste an exact copy (Spirit) in a new context that is identical to the original. The pasted text is distinct from the copy in its new location. Both copy and paste are interconnected with the original, but within a new context. The copy and paste each impart toward the new context without losing the voice of the original. Each image is identical. The uniqueness of each form is distinct. Each necessarily needs the others to complete the communication. The analogy lacks the fullness of personal being. But we can understand that the Pentecostal "pasting" is the outpouring of the acts of the Father and Son in new contexts. The Spirit is not sent on a separate mission from the Father and Son. The Spirit is a fully trinitarian

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 154.

person, fully engaged in new contexts, with the intent of the source still in force. Thus, each of God's acts in history are "an expression of God's own eternal being."<sup>28</sup>

It is clear that the Spirit is essential in knowing the triune God. However, for some, "There is a reticence about the Holy Spirit in that he constantly points us away from himself as he initiates us into knowledge of and relationship with the Father and the Son."<sup>29</sup> Yet, the Spirit is the unveiling mystery, precisely the point where our ability to know God is at stake. It is the Spirit who gives us ears to hear the Shepherd's voice and encounter the reconciling ministry of the Father and Son.<sup>30</sup> This is the pledge of the Spirit who works in us.<sup>31</sup> All three trinitarian persons work together in continuity with no independent actions. Smail sees this as a life of "mutual coordination and interdependence," of giving and receiving between the Son and the Spirit as improving on Barth's theology, which favors the Son and creates a one-sidedness that neglects important christological and pneumatological implications, as we shall see.<sup>32</sup>

The Holy Spirit is God displayed in a trinitarian context, making the others known. What the Spirit does, when sent into our hearts, is to cause us to cry "Abba, Father"<sup>33</sup> and to confess "Jesus is Lord."<sup>34</sup> No individual manifestation of tongues or other spiritual gifts can replace the essential reorientation of our being to the Father and Son by the Spirit.<sup>35</sup> How the Spirit acts may be distinct, but who the Spirit is and what the Spirit does are always within a personal relationship with the Father

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>29</sup> Smail, "Holy Spirit," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 421.

<sup>30</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19.

<sup>31</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14.

<sup>32</sup> T. A. Smail, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *Theology Beyond Christendom: Essays on the Centenary of the Birth of Karl Barth, May 10, 1886*, ed. John Thompson (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1986), 108.

<sup>33</sup> Galatians 4:6.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:3.

<sup>35</sup> Smail, "The Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity," in *Nicene Christianity*, 151-2.

and Son.<sup>36</sup> Smail borrows an image from James Packer, pointing out that the Spirit is like a huge searchlight that allows us to see a cathedral on a dark night, but we cannot look at the light. We honor the Spirit by looking at what is illuminated, namely the Father and Son.<sup>37</sup>

The triune life is inseparable. Even on the cross, the Father is still with the Son, even though the Son is "separated" from the Father in death in dealing with the consequences of sin. The Spirit was still present, as was appropriate throughout Jesus' life, and was not withdrawn on the cross.<sup>38</sup> Jesus was the Mediator on the Cross, and the Holy Spirit brings humans into an intimate indwelling with Jesus as he reconciles God and humanity. "The Holy Spirit is the freedom of God to be present to his creatures and sustain them in the creaturely being and reality, and thus to realise their relations with himself."<sup>39</sup> The cross reveals the love of God the Father coming to us in the work of the incarnate Son, in the inner life of the Trinity, including the Spirit: "The cross is a window opened into the very heart of God."<sup>40</sup>

As we will see in discussing the sending of the Spirit, the Father gives the gift of the Spirit, but only in the closest connection with the person and work of the Son.<sup>41</sup> Any fracturing of the internal relations and external actions can only lead to a loss of understanding and participation in the whole life of God with humanity, the life of the churches, and our own personal lives.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 132-33.

<sup>38</sup> T. A. Smail, *Once and for All: A Confession of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998), 134.

<sup>39</sup> T. F. Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man," in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World: Essays presented to James Torrance*, ed. Trevor Hart and Daniel Thimell (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1989), 384.

<sup>40</sup> Smail, *Once and for All*, 126. Smail is quoting here from T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 112.

<sup>41</sup> T. A. Smail. "The Holy Trinity and the Resurrection of Jesus," in *Different Gospels: Christian Orthodoxy and Modern Theologies*, ed. Andrew Walker (London: SPCK, 1993), 18.

## Jesus and the Spirit – God Embracing the Church

The relation between Jesus and the Holy Spirit provides the field within which guidance is needed and errors in the life of the Church come into view. While we cannot fully engage all the ancient debates, we can recognize that the outcome of the debates causes us to “insist that there can be no dealings with the Spirit that does not involve a dealing with the Son and no dealing with the Son that does not involve a dealing with the Spirit.”<sup>42</sup> This implies a double mediation that is central to the New Testament, and Smail turns to Torrance for its articulation, “In his new coming the Holy Spirit is mediated by Christ, and at the same time mediates Christ to us.”<sup>43</sup> All errors violate this basic collaboration of mutuality.

Both the Son and the Spirit are gifts of the Father. Initially, the Spirit is the Father’s gift to the Son. The Son gives the gift of the Spirit to us. This Spirit gifts us with life in the Son, and through him, brings us home to the Father.<sup>44</sup> We are born again as the Spirit of adoption brings us to share in the relation of the Son to the Father, discovering ourselves as the children of God who share the bond of love and in the Son cry out, “Abba, Father.”<sup>45</sup> The Son and Spirit are both Paracletes, called alongside us to help, not switching places or passing a baton, but indwelling us in uniqueness as both “Christ in you”<sup>46</sup> and “God’s Spirit who lives in you.”<sup>47</sup> And the Father comes to us in their indwelling in the togetherness of the love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>48</sup> These understandings lay the basis for rejecting any mode of separating the person and work of any of the three in any element of relating to us. Together, we share the *koinonia*, the communion that establishes the Church and our place in it within the personal embrace to receive all Christ has for us, and give

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<sup>42</sup> Smail, “Holy Spirit,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 423.

<sup>43</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 51, quoting Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 245.

<sup>44</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 113

<sup>45</sup> Romans 8:15.

<sup>46</sup> Galatians 2:20.

<sup>47</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16.

<sup>48</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 161-2.



ourselves in grateful response.<sup>49</sup> Having been gifted, we become sharers in the gift-giving to others.

As we discuss what it might mean to be charismatic or Pentecostal, we must recognize that this has little to do with physical manifestations and much to do with restoration and renewal in these primary relationships with the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Only by being recentered in this way may we appropriately serve our neighbor and the mission of God in the world. We become charismatic as we participate in the dynamic field of the Spirit's work — beginning with hearing and confessing fidelity to Abba and his Son.<sup>50</sup>

The Son prepared the way for the Spirit as he ascended to heaven to the Father; otherwise, "the kingdom of heaven could not be opened to believers, and the blessing of the divine Spirit could not be poured out upon human flesh or be received by sinful mortal men."<sup>51</sup> But this Spirit moves us towards Christ. Through him, we respond to what Christ has done for us. The Spirit enables us to say "yes" and to affirm Jesus' presence and power with fresh expressions in all the situations of our lives. What Christ does *for* us enables what the Spirit does *in* us as life in response.<sup>52</sup> We yield to the work of the Son and Spirit in our life of obedience compelled by love and empowered by his redeeming presence.

Even Jesus receives the Spirit from the Father and by the Spirit responds to the Father. The Father is the source of the Son and Spirit and the One to whom Jesus gives himself by the Spirit. We receive the Father's Spirit through Jesus and in the Spirit we respond to the Father through Jesus.<sup>53</sup> We are gifted to share in the triune fulfillment of love that comes to us and brings us home, even as we continue our earthly journey.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>51</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 110, quoting Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 248.

<sup>52</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 112.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 108.

Smail thought Torrance's affirmation of the vicarious response of Jesus on our behalf was important. He agreed that we depend on Jesus' response and his acting in our place. However, Smail was "dissatisfied" with how Christ's response works in us. Smail clarifies that we cannot respond to the Father *by ourselves* until the Son has responded for us. But we must answer *for ourselves* as the Spirit makes available to us the power to respond on our side of the relationship.<sup>54</sup> We say an "Amen" by the Spirit as we cry out "Abba." The life that the Spirit gives is a life of responsiveness, alive in purposeful interaction.<sup>55</sup>

Elmer Colyer recognizes the difficulty with Torrance's "radical emphasis" on the total substitution of Jesus on our behalf. Torrance's emphasis could be seen to undermine our response and our agency in the relationship.<sup>56</sup> Colyer believes one must get the logic of God's grace in the right order to see that the human agency is developed in the transformation initiated by Jesus. This does not exclude the human, but makes room for human interaction within time and space through the work of the Spirit within us.<sup>57</sup>

Chris Kettler further investigates this accusation as it appears in Smail, suggesting that Smail may introduce a cleavage between the Son and Spirit. One may think that "all of Christ means none of me," a total substitution. Our sense of participation appears threatened, neglecting any place for ourselves. Kettler suggests that view would *destroy* the human rather than *restore* their humanity.<sup>58</sup> But this is not a simple cause and effect scenario, where Jesus acts and we are passively affected. The individual human response echoes what Christ has done, including what we need to do ourselves. Kettler asserts that Smail needs to amend "I need to go and do myself" with "... in Christ." Kettler asserts that the "crucial ministry of the Spirit is to enable us to participate by faith in the perfect obedience

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 109. Smail quotes from Torrance, *Mediation of Christ*, 104.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>56</sup> Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 117-18.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 118-19.

<sup>58</sup> Christian D. Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 139-40.

of the Son to the Father."<sup>59</sup> The faithfulness of Jesus undergirds our faith and response. We are gathered within the embrace of the Incarnation.<sup>60</sup> There is no independent personal reality outside our dynamic life in Christ by the Spirit. I suggest that we amend the original statement with "... in the Spirit," rather than "... in Christ." Smail already assumed Christ has done all for us and it is now the Spirit who brings us to indwell Jesus, just as Jesus was empowered by the Spirit. We need to hold Jesus and the Spirit together in all personal dynamics. As Smail says, "Christ says 'Yes' to God for us, but the Spirit liberates us to say 'Yes' to Christ for ourselves."<sup>61</sup> This corresponds to Torrance's statement,

the Spirit is present in such a way as to make him open to God and capable of responding to him. Here the Spirit is to be thought of as acting not only from God toward man but from man toward God by bringing his human relations with God to their proper end in him, and thereby undergirding and upholding man in an enduring ontological relation to God ... he does have a relation to God which is continuously given and unceasingly sustained by the creative presence and power of the Spirit. In this event, as we have seen, man is not to be understood from an independent centre in himself but only from above and beyond himself in a 'transcendental' relation to God – and therefore also, of course, in a transcendental relation to his fellow-men.<sup>62</sup>

In this Spirit-infused life, the glory of the Father and Son is reflected in us by the Spirit, taking from the life of the Head and making it invigorate the life of the members of the body.<sup>63</sup> In this way, we see the double mediation, as the Spirit is

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<sup>59</sup> Kettler, *Vicarious Humanity*, 141.

<sup>60</sup> T. F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 142.

<sup>61</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 174.

<sup>62</sup> Torrance, "Goodness and Dignity," 382-83.

<sup>63</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 81.

mediated by Christ, and the Spirit mediates Christ to us.<sup>64</sup> Being grounded in the life of Christ's mission, the Spirit who brings the power of God to Jesus now works the same power in us. This is in continuity with the extending life of God, ecstatically reaching out for the wholeness of humanity, restoring and creating a life in communion within the community of God.

Instead of looking for gifts given by the Spirit, as is common in charismatic practice, we need to see that the gift *is* the Spirit. Both the Son and Spirit indwell us in different ways to bring us into the life of God. Jesus indwells us to restore and renew our life with God; we share his death and life and the mission of his life-giving grace. The Spirit relates us to the Father through the Son, bringing their life to us and then bringing us home to them.<sup>65</sup> In the Spirit, they give themselves to us in a personal expression of togetherness.<sup>66</sup> Unitedly, they dispense from the love of the Father, through the Son, the Spirit who brings all that is given to fulfill the possibilities of who we are in Christ.<sup>67</sup>

If we focus on human benefits more than on the life of Christ and the Spirit, we go astray. This is even true of "Spirit-led" movements. "The more the renewal relates to the central things of the gospel, e.g. the person of Christ rather than tongues or healing, the more its contribution becomes recognizable and receivable by the rest of the Church, and the more it is delivered from its own idiosyncrasies and eccentricities."<sup>68</sup> Like Jesus, we must proceed with the Spirit of the Lord upon us and continue in his ministry.<sup>69</sup> Only then can we authentically reflect the glory of God, sharing in the service of Jesus by the power of the Spirit.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 51-53 for how Christ brings us the Spirit, referring to Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 245. See also *Reflected Glory*, 61-63 for how the Spirit mediates Christ to us.

<sup>65</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 58-65.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>67</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 70.

<sup>68</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Smail, "Doctrine of Holy Spirit," *Nicene Creed*, 163.

<sup>70</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 36.

Missing an appropriate understanding of the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit causes a myriad of problems. This may happen even at the level of great traditions — Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, or those trying to be unaffiliated — or in individual experiences and the practices of churches.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, one may tragically collapse the whole Trinity of God into one Spirit in a unitarian structure and lose the particularity of the persons.<sup>72</sup> Also, the Spirit may be absorbed into Jesus, as Purves critiques Barth and Torrance for doing. When the Son becomes too central, the Spirit is reduced to a bond between the Father and Son and loses the distinction of the full personhood of the other two.<sup>73</sup> The list of inappropriate understandings could be quite long and serious.

While affirming the centrality of Jesus, we cannot allow a loss of affirming the person of the Holy Spirit.<sup>74</sup> We are freed by Jesus to enter the life of the Trinity; we are freed for Christ and his service by the distinctive work of the Spirit. If we discount the work of the Spirit, we default to making Jesus an authoritarian figure in the life of the Church, with little concern about the Spirit's involvement. If we emphasize the work of the Spirit over Jesus, we encourage autonomy in the name of the Spirit, who is no longer the Spirit of Christ.

We need balance between what Christ does *for* us and what the Spirit does *in* us. This enables the dynamic participation that Smail thinks Torrance has missed.<sup>75</sup> He also acknowledges the more significant problem of becoming over-interested in the Spirit in a way that may lead to unbalanced Christian mysticism (as in some Eastern Orthodoxy), religious pluralism (as in Western liberalism), or charismatic excess (as in Pentecostal and charismatic experience).<sup>76</sup> The Eastern Orthodox accuse the West of depersonalizing the Trinity in pursuit of power for the Church. Spiritual power is sought through an infallible Pope (Roman Catholic), an infallible

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<sup>71</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 69-73.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-40.

<sup>73</sup> Purves, *Charismatic Movement*, 203, 211, 219, 222, and see 209 for what has been missing in Scotland, as the Spirit is de-emphasized in the church as it focuses on Jesus.

<sup>74</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 66-71.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-35.

Bible (evangelical Christian), a fixed liturgy (no room for the Spirit), or a minister-dominated church (where the Spirit is optional).<sup>77</sup> The work of Jesus needs to be focal, but the very centrality of his work cannot exclude the collaborative work of the Spirit in our theology and practice.

One of the greatest concerns is tritheism, separating the trinitarian persons into divided individuals, as perhaps portrayed in the Rublev Icon. The Spirit can appear to be just another Son, almost indistinguishable from Jesus. But the Spirit is another kind of person.<sup>78</sup> In equalizing and humanizing the three, one loses the interrelatedness and uniqueness that are essential to the dynamic life of the Trinity. Augustinian models have their own unique problems, whether the unity is conceived by human experience (to remember, understand, and will) in the unity of human psychology or the reduction of the Spirit to a bond between the Father and Son, creating a depersonalized binitarian image.<sup>79</sup> These metaphors can lead one to think about God in his eternal nature, but neglect appropriate interpersonal encounters in space and time.

Separating Jesus and the Spirit even impacts how we read Scripture. If we make the Bible a text with Jesus as the final authority, we can forget that it was inspired by the Spirit and illuminated by the Spirit. Placing Jesus as the authority may imply a fixed interpretation that often shifts authority to the interpreter and dismisses the present activity of the Spirit. A Bible-based church that is not Spirit-led will tend to default to human authority, gradually usurping the place of Christ and the Spirit. A Spirit-led church that is not Bible-based will make claims of the Spirit that are inconsistent with the person of Jesus. But Jesus must be the final authority and the Bible must refer to him through the lens of what the Spirit is doing.<sup>80</sup> Proper interpretation must employ a christological pneumatology and a pneumatological Christology, heard within the unity of a mutually informed life, through the voice of Jesus and with the ears of the Spirit.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-35.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Humans create all kinds of replacements for the Spirit and Jesus, dividing and utilizing a theology that serves human needs. One can replace the Spirit with isolated concepts of grace, divine acts, or any theological belief in a manner severed from the Spirit, and the presence of the Son.<sup>81</sup> We get lost in the idea and miss the immediacy of the divine persons. One can also replace the Spirit with techniques and technology, liberated to follow agendas of success through human performance setting the stage.<sup>82</sup> It is far too common to interpret the Bible for ourselves and by ourselves and neglect the voice of Jesus and the leading of the Spirit.

It is not uncommon to subordinate the Spirit to the Son, following a hierarchy of power. There comes a point that the Spirit simply is reduced to power, dissolved into the activity of the Son. Smail recognized that even he had done that in *Reflected Glory*.<sup>83</sup> Once one subordinates the Spirit to the Son, it is easy to follow an authoritarian logic. The Pope stands over the Church, and the Bible and ministers rule over the congregation. Calls for submission to these authorities replace the freedom and wonder of the Spirit in living out the love of Christ.<sup>84</sup> Orthodox theologians trace the troubling weaknesses of the Western Church to a depreciation of the Spirit and a replacement by human structures.<sup>85</sup> Where the Spirit is absent or silenced, power will be given to “vicars” who take the place of the Vicarious Christ and his Spirit who brings us to share Jesus’ life.

In the subordination of the Spirit to the Son, one can also get a sequential, almost modalistic framing of the Trinity. Jesus is held as the one who saves us and reconciles us by his blood into which we are baptized. This leaves room for a second baptism in the Spirit, a second blessing to take the believer to the next step as a second stage. This can introduce a whole realm of spiritual activity that becomes independent of Christ. The critical control as to what is accounted to be “of the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 134.

Spirit of Christ" is abandoned for dramatic experiences in a manner that does not test the spirits.<sup>86</sup> When the Spirit of Pentecost is separated from the anchor of Calvary and Easter, it departs from the reconciling and redeeming work of God and building of the Body into Christ as the Head, experienced in the grace and love of the Spirit's *koinonia*.<sup>87</sup>

When the Spirit becomes less than a full person (the spirit of this place), the end result is either impersonal theology and church practice, or the Spirit is seen as an untrustworthy, absent power to be contained by those in power. The Spirit may become a mode of power to be harnessed or, conversely, one from whom the Church is to be quarantined, thus losing a sense of being a full person in his own right. The Trinity becomes binitarian when the Father-Son relation becomes the heart of the gospel and the Spirit is largely forgotten.<sup>88</sup>

In a further tragic move, the Spirit is absorbed into the human spirit.<sup>89</sup> The individualist urge of the twentieth century moved churches and believers to harness the power of the Spirit so that the gifts are humanly possessed. The Spirit is "on tap" at a Holy Spirit meeting, to top up and play out the independent autonomy of the individual. Similarly, an authoritarian structure in a church may collapse into self-rule, each person developing a form of spiritual anarchy.

The Church is threatened when the realm of the Spirit becomes all about power, which spreads in several cloaked forms. It may occur in the context of charismatic/Pentecostal, in the certainty of the apologist/legalist, or in the monastic/mystical experience of liberal traditions. In each of these ways, the Spirit becomes the possession of, or servant to, the believer, providing what is humanly desired. However, no power, wisdom, insight, or any other gift is given as our possession. The Spirit is the gift, enabling his people to function as the body of Christ, serving God's creative, reconciling, and redeeming purposes.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>87</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 103-4.

<sup>88</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 42.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 21.



Only the true Spirit of Jesus brings humble obedience to build the whole Church and not create heroes and leading actors. Those claiming to follow the Spirit cannot be seen to replace Jesus, adding to what he is doing in an inconsistent manner, or acting independently of him. We must always follow the Christ-ward bend of the Spirit.<sup>91</sup> The Spirit does not in any way replace Jesus, but is the means to relate to the one who is alive and present in personal harmony.<sup>92</sup>

## **The Spirit as the Giver of Life - Extending the Church**

We have established the critical relation of the Holy Spirit to the Trinity, to the Son in particular, and now we will look at the unique contributions of the Spirit to the Church and Christians.

The Spirit gifts the Church with the Living God. The writers of the Written Word, the Bible, are those moved by the Spirit to witness to the Living Word. The Spirit also gives the Church wisdom to interpret, remember, and hear the person who reveals God in the flesh.<sup>93</sup> With biblical knowledge and theological expertise, the Church develops doctrine to lead us to Christ and the Father through the guiding power of the Spirit.<sup>94</sup> All that follows in the life of the Church is moved by the Spirit in creative continuity with the Father and Son, who keep the Church aligned and engaged with the penetrating voice of the Living God.<sup>95</sup>

The Spirit gives us the gift of adoption. The Spirit has already been given to us as children, beginning to share in what has not yet been fulfilled, the already and not yet.<sup>96</sup> We must not adopt a form of triumphalism, which causes us to make claims for our power and knowledge beyond what is given by God, as happened in Corinth. However, we assuredly know we are the children of Abba when the Spirit moves in us to cry out his name and we embrace the one who has embraced us.

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<sup>91</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 13.

<sup>92</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 40.

<sup>93</sup> Smail, *Once and for All*, 5.

<sup>94</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 80.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>96</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 122.

The Spirit is key in God's salvation story. Think of the Spirit's life-giving actions at Easter, causing Jesus to be raised from the dead,<sup>97</sup> confirming the Father's judgment of reconciliation for humanity, and revealing the deity of the Son. In this act, the Spirit is seen as mutually interdependent in the salvation event, as well as later moving the Church to live in response to this divine action.

The gifting to the Church continues at Pentecost, as the Risen Lord sends the Spirit to the waiting and soon-to-be empowered Church.<sup>98</sup> The Spirit has been involved in gifting the world since its creation and continues to be the agent of restoration and renewal in the world and in the Church, as well as in particular persons.

The Spirit is also at work in the culmination of all things.<sup>99</sup> But the Spirit is never alone in any activity; even at Pentecost, the Father is sending the promised Spirit, continuing Jesus' paracletic work. The gift is a fully integrated trinitarian outpouring, inviting new possibilities for humanity in concert with God's embrace and empowerment.<sup>100</sup>

After the giving of the gift at Pentecost, the Church experiences new practices of sharing in word, power, healing, meals, and a new life in common.<sup>101</sup> At Pentecost, we discover the Spirit is the gift and source of all that follows.<sup>102</sup> The Spirit is the Gift that keeps on giving, opening the realm of grace to humanity as the habitat of dynamic relationships, that is, the personal realm.<sup>103</sup> Any view of the Spirit that slides toward impersonal purposes is alien to this life-giving Spirit first

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<sup>97</sup> Romans 8:11.

<sup>98</sup> Smail, "The Holy Trinity and the Resurrection," in *Different Gospels*, 23.

<sup>99</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 168-9.

<sup>100</sup> Smail, "The Holy Trinity and the Resurrection," in *Different Gospels*, 17.

<sup>101</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 183.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. See Acts 2:38, in which the Church will receive "the gift of the Holy Spirit."

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-21.

seen in enlivening the Son in his earthly body and then his churchly body on earth.<sup>104</sup>

The Spirit does not give of himself alone, but provides what the Father and Son offer through him to us.<sup>105</sup> Only in this way can we be aligned with the fact that Christ is the Head and the Spirit brings the face and voice of Jesus to be known, extending what was done objectively by Jesus to be experienced in the life of the Church.<sup>106</sup> Even Jesus receives the Spirit at his baptism, getting the Father's blessing. Now we are included by the same Spirit, empowered to share his work.<sup>107</sup> The Spirit does not merely gift us the created life of the present age; we are promised the life of the age to come. The inbreaking of the Spirit provides the first installment of God's fulfillment. The Spirit draws us to live into the future, focused on where we are going rather than where we have been.<sup>108</sup> The freedom of the Spirit provides insight, looking with new eyes toward what is to come as we personally engage the Living God.

The Spirit also gifts us with belief to hear and respond to the promises of God. As we live expectant that Jesus goes with us, we find we are existing in the freedom of the Spirit. We do not just believe we are forgiven and reconciled to God; we become children who trust the one who is with us, creating expectancy, knowing that we are not alone but going forward in the power of the Spirit as Jesus did.<sup>109</sup> The Spirit intertwines our life together.

Traditionally, we affirm baptism into Christ, but must also discuss baptism in the Spirit. If we are to refer to this baptism as a real gift in our experience, we must be clear about what we are affirming. This is a biblical concept, but one among many terms or phrases for the initiating work of the Spirit.<sup>110</sup> Each biblical

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<sup>104</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 134.

<sup>105</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 14.

<sup>106</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 16.

<sup>107</sup> Smail, "The Holy Trinity and the Resurrection," in *Different Gospels*, 25.

<sup>108</sup> Smail, "The Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity," in *Nicene Christianity*, 153.

<sup>109</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 145.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-35.

image used should not be assigned a different meaning. All activities need to be acknowledged as the creative work of the one Spirit, who gifts in dynamic, not formulaic, ways. Smail rejects describing in only one phrase, such as initial evidence or baptism in the Spirit, the many ways the Spirit works in believers. This reductionism focuses on the experience of the believer, sets limits established by humans, and makes the Spirit a force more than a person.<sup>111</sup> The Spirit's work must be seen in the context of Christ's baptism and in continuity with it. What has begun in Jesus is consequently nurtured by the Spirit.<sup>112</sup> They work in concert; we cannot divide them in our experience. Baptism in the Spirit must also reflect the content of Jesus' baptism and the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to release power to continue his work in the disciples.<sup>113</sup>

Human belief in the work of the Spirit is an important component. If one resists or disbelieves that the Spirit is at work in them, it is less likely they will experience the gifts or fruit of the Spirit. There are no conditions to receiving the Spirit, but there are consequences of resisting the Spirit, which becomes an act of self-exclusion.<sup>114</sup> To allow oneself to be included in the Spirit's gifting is to open to the creativity of the Spirit. The Spirit "does the same thing differently" in each person.<sup>115</sup>

Jesus is at work by his Spirit to bring us to freedom fostered by his love.<sup>116</sup> We are not given autonomous power by the Spirit; we are empowered to follow Jesus faithfully in present expressions of his ministry, made effective by yielding to the same Spirit who empowers him. This is our participation in Christ, renewed in life by him, drawn to intimacy with him, and involved by the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>117</sup> We are endowed by the Spirit to express the gifts that further the triune

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 138-39.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 139-44.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 144-45.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>116</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 70.

<sup>117</sup> Smail, *Once and for All*, 153.

mission in the world. Unfortunately, many non-charismatic churches implicitly focus on a humanly controlled ministry or explicitly deny echoes of the Spirit's work in the Bible.<sup>118</sup> But the Jesus of the Bible releases the Spirit here and now, not just then and there in ancient times.

A primary gift the Spirit offers us is a shared life, the *koinonia* with Christ that then weaves us into a community.<sup>119</sup> Vertical connection with the triune God creates a fellowship, a community that can only be realized in communion with God and humanity.<sup>120</sup> This belonging to Christ means inclusion in his body, the Church. The resulting life of love is nurtured in Christ by his Spirit. We learn that love grows into sharing, including within the community as well as to neighbors and strangers, as we see in the book of Acts. The *koinonia*, sharing of life together, precedes *charismata*, the gifting life, as a development of the sharing community. "The initial evidence that we share in the Church's baptism in the Spirit is less speaking in tongues and more in new relationships of love with God and with others."<sup>121</sup>

The unity of the Church is also the gift of the Spirit. Our unity cannot be in doctrine alone but in the mutuality of love that reflects the life of the triune God. The Spirit provides more than an invisible bond; we are integrated at the heart level into the life of Christ and woven into one another in mutual self-giving. When there are divisions, it is evidence of the lack of yielding to the Spirit, in submission to Christ. Unity cannot simply be in proximity in the same space or committed to the local mission. Unity is nurtured as we are baptized in Christ, and through the Spirit begin manifesting a life guided and empowered by the present presence of the Living God.<sup>122</sup> For Smail, the charismatic movement broke down barriers for many people and revealed the Spirit afresh to listen to each other and become respected friends.<sup>123</sup> For others, it created new walls by resisting the Spirit's work.

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<sup>118</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 54.

<sup>119</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 52-53.

<sup>120</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 182-83.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-89.

<sup>123</sup> T. A. Smail, "When Wright was Right," in *Challenging to Change: Dialogs with a Radical Baptist Theologian*, ed by David Coffey (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 162.

The Church is built from the beginning by the illumination of the Spirit. The early Church drew life from the apostolic witness, speaking still in the present witness of the contemporary Church, making present the living Christ as Lord of the Church. Unity today needs to come through yielding to Christ's active involvement in speaking in the Church as the Spirit gifts with understanding, convicting and regenerating the community to grow in living as participants in the Kingdom of God.<sup>124</sup> When we finally cry, "Abba, Father," we are assured by the Spirit of adoption that we are those addressed by Christ, who now share his Abba cry, having been awakened to the witness that has called us home.

The Son intercedes for us with the Father, and the Spirit also intercedes in our life of prayer and worship. This gift of access brings intimacy, fulfilling what we are unable to provide.<sup>125</sup> In this dependence on the Spirit, we become transformed to have the mind of Christ, to be restored to Christ's image, and to bear the Spirit's fruit as evidence of what has been empowered in us apart from our doing. The empowering of love is made available, not gained by achievement.<sup>126</sup>

By the Spirit, we are made witnesses, a gift unleashing the good news of all that has come to us in Jesus. We share his ministry. We do not have our own ministry, but are gifted to engage in the liberating ministry that sets hearts free.<sup>127</sup> As Jesus began his ministry with "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," so we share in the proclamation of freedom, healing, and announcing the Kingdom come.<sup>128</sup> We do not simply echo or reflect on Jesus in our proclamation. By the Spirit, we are personally creative, even artistic, in speaking his story, living from a christological center as we spiritually portray Jesus in our cultural and historical situations with the Spirit shaping our story. Conformity to human ideals must be set aside. Creativity must be inhaled in submitting to the Spirit, who is an Artist at work in us

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<sup>124</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 53.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>127</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 103.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

and through us on the canvas of our community.<sup>129</sup> This collaboration is recreative and restorative for the whole community.<sup>130</sup> When the Spirit sets persons aside for service, in a manner true to who they are in Christ and in their uniqueness, there are no stereotypes, no models to follow. We are readied, caused by the Spirit to invite others to come drink the water of life,<sup>131</sup> but also to hear and speak what Jesus says to the neighborhood. This partnership creates a purposeful, creative, responsive arrangement born of the Giver of life. We are integrated into the life of God, fulfilling his purposes in love, receptive to the personal dynamics that overcome our fallen nature as we die to self and are awakened by the Spirit, who makes us alive to God and each other as we are meant to be.<sup>132</sup>

## **Addressing Inadequate Theologies of the Spirit – Correcting the Church**

For Torrance and Smail, a proper theology provides context for correction. We will note a few of the more recent issues that arise from an inadequate understanding of the Spirit. We will contrast the Torrance-Smail proposal with misinformed theologies in the practices of the Church, especially Pentecostal-charismatic expressions.

### **The Problem of Individualism**

In recent times, church culture has drifted toward focusing on the spirit of the individual human and away from the Holy Spirit. Individual experience dominates over the witness of Scripture regarding the Spirit of God. However, God's purposes call us away from privatized and domesticated religious experiences, to share the life of God with the world in creative and restorative ways.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>131</sup> Revelation 22:17.

<sup>132</sup> Smail, *Giving Gift*, 178-9.

<sup>133</sup> Smail, "When Wright was Right," in *Challenging to Change*, 168.

Smail notes that the rise of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century was preceded by the holiness movement. That development distorted the essence of Wesley's teaching and focused on the experience of the individual believer who fulfilled the conditions for receiving the Spirit in a special way.<sup>134</sup> Smail believes the charismatic renewal is an authentic work of the Holy Spirit, but that it is rooted in the Reformation tradition with a move toward individual interpretation. This continued through Pietism and holiness teaching with individual concern for piety. Finally, this course developed through classical Pentecostalism with its concern for the individual experience of the Spirit.<sup>135</sup> This trajectory has influenced the spirit of the age to think of the Spirit specifically encountered in individual human experience and not from the revelation of God through the Bible.

Stated theologically, the subjective experience of Pentecost has overshadowed and often replaced the objective work of Jesus on the cross.<sup>136</sup> When this happens, an "uncrucified carnality" is released as the human pursues spiritual ecstasy detached from the source of either the Son or Spirit.<sup>137</sup> What is missing is significant; Smail states that he almost called *The Giving Gift* something like *What the Charismatic Renewal did not say about the Holy Spirit*.<sup>138</sup> Like the Corinthian Christians, "exclusiveness, arrogance, disregard for the truth, and hunger for power" may come to characterize and neutralize the work of the Spirit.<sup>139</sup>

Initial evidence of the Spirit may appear in an individualized form as speaking in tongues. A better understanding comes when we see ourselves as adopted children who cry out, "Abba, Father." This is evidence of the new relationship enacted by the Spirit and reveals that our identity is transformed.<sup>140</sup> Rather than displays of supernatural manifestations, the love that echoes from

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<sup>134</sup> Smail, "Holy Spirit," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 424.

<sup>135</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 53-54.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>137</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 59.

<sup>138</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 11.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>140</sup> Smail, "When Wright was Right," in *Challenging to Change*, 168-69.



Calvary is the surest sign. When methods and techniques to unlock the divine become dominant, the movement has slipped into a form of near gnostic practices with claims of special knowledge to access the power of God.<sup>141</sup>

### **The Problem of Autonomy**

A new model of "Christian" life arises when we lose the power of Calvary, move to autonomous concerns, and pursue a second successive stage of the Spirit.<sup>142</sup> This approach tragically leads to a belief that we may possess power that the Spirit hands over to us. But the only power the Spirit gives comes from the love poured out on the cross, the healing born of God's love, and this results in glory being given to Jesus as we are crucified and rise with him.<sup>143</sup> The self-seeking model is a shadow of the reality it attempts to claim.

Having claimed the life of the Spirit, charismatics may speak of "anointing" by the Spirit for a functionally independent ministry. This follows from the fact that Jesus was anointed for ministry in the Spirit, liberating the oppressed and proclaiming Jubilee for a life of sharing.<sup>144</sup> This is still possible, but when the anointing lacks sharing of Jesus' concern for the broken and oppressed, it erodes credibility. Anointing makes theological sense only when Jesus is glorified, the Spirit is honored, and humility adorns the servant.

When an autonomous individual, with their own ministry, decides what ministry looks like, there is little room left for Jesus or the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it should be that, in responding to the Spirit, we are enabled to care for each person and situation as the Spirit leads.<sup>145</sup> When the origin of ministry is in the human, it takes on a false form of power, crushing in victories that do not look like the cross.<sup>146</sup> Exhibitionism and self-fulfillment, counting how many gifts are

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<sup>141</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 63-64.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>143</sup> T. A. Smail, *Windows on the Cross* ((London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995), 117.

<sup>144</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 104.

<sup>145</sup> Smail, *Once and For All*, 172.

<sup>146</sup> Smail, *Windows on the Cross*, 88.

manifested, become expressions of greed and not the Spirit on a mission of love.<sup>147</sup> We come to a crossroads, asking whether one is pursuing the love of power or the power of love.<sup>148</sup> The Spirit can inappropriately be conceived as a force, dispensing supernatural energy to conquer, forgetting the self-giving love of Jesus on the cross, who heals our humanity and restores us to his Father. "Charismatics have often switched the emphasis from the Son to the Spirit as the sovereign source of renewal, power, and spiritual gifts and fruit."<sup>149</sup> What begins as a new emphasis becomes a swapping out of the Son who is replaced by the Spirit.

### **The Problem of Triumphalism**

Success in "Spirit-empowered" ministry can become results-oriented.<sup>150</sup> A kind of triumphalism takes over. <sup>151</sup> The pursuit of mountain-top experiences overshadows the loving and saving experience of Jesus himself. The show has usurped salvation. The Spirit comes along with a "second blessing" as a step up in the spiritual life after receiving Jesus.

Second blessing theology subtly replaces the work of the cross as it features the sensational experience of individuals. It neglects the community in continuity with Jesus. The debate, as Smail saw it, was about a proper theological emphasis on the Spirit at work in drawing the church into the life and mission of the triune God over against an individually-focused search for empowerment and experience that diverges from life together with the triune God.<sup>152</sup> Smail refused to embrace any second blessing theology, as dividing the Trinity, misconstruing the Spirit, and not remaining true to the intent of Scripture.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 178.

<sup>148</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 61.

<sup>149</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 19. See the following pages on this shift and the problem of missing the Father!

<sup>150</sup> Smail, "When Wright was Right," in *Challenging to Change*, 171-72.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>152</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 38.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-37 and 48-49.

It is paramount that we not separate the Spirit from the Father and the Son. That leaves us with an independent Spirit who can no longer be the Holy Spirit. But there is no autonomous realm of the Spirit.<sup>154</sup> The Spirit is only the self-giving of the Father and the Son, and any depiction of the Spirit or his work that abandons this has fractured the life of God and the meaning of the three persons.<sup>155</sup> Subtly, a theology of glory replaces the theology of the cross.<sup>156</sup> Consequently, worship and ministry celebrate triumph, forgetting God's suffering and humanity's sinfulness. God's true gifts are neglected, as well as our life of confession and intercession in response to the living Christ.

### **The Problem of Synergism**

Smail also raises concerns over Arminian and Pentecostal attitudes that present the Spirit as synergistic with humans. Our understanding of God becomes conditioned by our faith, shifting the focus to affirm the free will of humans, which ends up abandoning us to ourselves. The gifting of the Spirit becomes the result of conditions that we believe God lays down for us. Humans "work with God" in a conditional manner that undermines the actual gift of God and his Spirit.<sup>157</sup> If the Christian life begins with us, it follows that we must keep it growing. However, if this life is the Spirit's regenerating work, then it follows that our growth is also sustained by the Spirit at work by grace.<sup>158</sup> Human religions are always in competition with the Holy Spirit, subverting the freedom of God, who had poured out his grace. Humans who conform to human interpretations of the Spirit live under the rule and judgment that are deprived of what the Son and Spirit work out on our behalf.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 25.

<sup>155</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 157.

<sup>156</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 111.

<sup>157</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 154-55.

<sup>158</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 84.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Churches that conform to human standards are reduced to autocratic institutions and eventually die.<sup>160</sup> Absent the Spirit who is the giver of life, the community fossilizes, submitting to other authorities than Christ and the Spirit. Churches that universalize Jesus and the Spirit end up with a deist god who leaves a residue of spirituality but little trace of the personal life of the living God. Human ideals form the spirit of the group, leading according to its values. Laws of spiritual experience show up as rules to replace the responsive, personal life.<sup>161</sup>

### **The Problem of Revivalism**

Outside the walls of the Church, along with meaningful revivals there are often revivals that Smail believes are false because they make claims on the Spirit's work. These are escapist, built on false prophecies, leading to disappointment and disillusion.<sup>162</sup> Importantly, they usually miss the presence of focus on the Father who sends the Son and the Spirit. The Spirit shows up as an occasional visitor after long periods of absence and departs when the event is over.<sup>163</sup> The goal of true revival is to hear the Word of the Lord afresh, and this is lost when leaders take it upon themselves to dispense the gifts of the Spirit through their activities, missing the discernment that should accompany all claims that the Spirit is at work.

We must be clear that proper alignment with the Spirit is in cooperation with Jesus, who is sent from the Father. We cannot create any experiences or make promises that are not first true of their loving will to work in us and through us. We ought to be freed from guilt and confusion as we align with the Spirit's work and sense the authenticity of love and joy that follow as we live within the triune embrace.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 196.

<sup>161</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 41-42.

<sup>162</sup> T. A. Smail, "The Ethics of Exile and the Rhythm of Resurrection," in *On Revival: A Critical Examination*, ed. Andrew Walker and Kristin Aune (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 59, 63.

<sup>163</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 189.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

### **The Problem of Distortions**

In the West, there is a tendency to fear the work of the Spirit, due to the Pentecostal and charismatic movements.<sup>165</sup> This fear does not create freedom for the life of the Spirit. It does not attune to the Spirit that Jesus promises in the Bible. A Spirit-impooverished Church is a flat-tire Church, as Barth stated.<sup>166</sup> Cutting ourselves off from the Spirit may be as damaging in its own way as misconstruing the Spirit. Choosing Jesus while neglecting the Spirit raises the question of which Jesus we are following. Forgetting the work of the Son and Spirit, who bring us to the Father, reveals a deeper dimension of misconstruing all three and our place within their life. This reflects one of many forms of Trinity Deficit Disorder.<sup>167</sup>

It is not surprising that restoration movements arise, attempting to renew life in the Spirit. From house churches to non-denominational movements to the recent Pentecostal and charismatic movements, spiritual change is pursued from a heart seeking renewal. The desire to restore the Church from its human traditions, legalistic structures, and other misguided formulations leaves us vulnerable to factions, not unlike those we find in 1 Corinthians.<sup>168</sup> Like them, we may desire to live in the triumph of the resurrection, but lack the love that reflects the Spirit's leading by our spirit of triumphalism, thus living as though we can claim the power on our own terms, while in actuality we only deceive ourselves and others.<sup>169</sup> An honest restoration can only come when we acknowledge our sin and inadequacy and abandon our desire for constant victory, or end the myth that the Spirit should yield to our desires.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>166</sup> Karl Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, introduction and epilogue by John D. Godsey (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966), 83. A pneumatic tire without air is useless.

<sup>167</sup> Marty Folsom, *Face to Face: Sharing God's Life, Volume 3* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 228-34.

<sup>168</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 78.

<sup>169</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 122-23.

<sup>170</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 68.

The great danger of misunderstanding the Spirit is that we become human-focused with a need-centered distortion that informs our relationship.<sup>171</sup> Persons quest for gifts to fulfill their individual lives, and not for a revival of God's will in the life of the Church. But if our motives are awry, "Spiritual gifts are dangerous in the hands of fleshly people, as Paul's warnings to the Corinthians clearly show."<sup>172</sup> We end up with various forms of pietistic individualism, sensationalism, superficiality, and personal self-fulfillment.

Those who lead churches have a responsibility to remain servants of the triune God, not authoritarian managers who either resist or employ the Spirit for their own purposes. It is far too easy to attempt to lead without the Spirit, even focusing on Jesus, but forgetting the Spirit given as a gift to build up the Church. Leaders become replacements for Jesus and the Spirit, and the Church is depersonalized,<sup>173</sup> rather than made personal by the personalizing persons of the Son and the Spirit.<sup>174</sup> Torrance affirmed Cyril's thought of understanding the "Holy Spirit as spiritualising, enlightening and rationalising, and thus the one personalising being, to whom all other spiritual and rational natures are indebted."<sup>175</sup> This affirmation encourages us to see the constructive value of a proper understanding of the Holy Spirit guiding the Church within God's personal life.

## **A Constructive Theology of the Spirit – Guiding the Church**

For Torrance and Smail, proper theology guides the Church to participate in the life of the triune God as it receives and reveals God's mission of reconciliation in the world. The Spirit brings the life of God to humanity, reminding and unfolding the future fulfillment toward which God leads us among his renewing of the entire

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<sup>171</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 28.

<sup>172</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 18.

<sup>173</sup> Smail, "The Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity," in *Nicene Christianity*, 162.

<sup>174</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Reality & Evangelical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stpck, 2003), 140.

<sup>175</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, Second Edition (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 227.

cosmos. We will now survey constructive proposals for the correlation between the life of the Spirit and the practices of the Church.

### **The Spirit Guides the Church**

A significant problem for the Church is that its teaching on the Spirit's work in equipping the Church for fellowship and mission has been muted or neglected.<sup>176</sup> The Church needs to be released from its dependence on human leaders, self-focus, and institutional forms that replace or reject the Spirit's igniting, guiding, and empowering work. Our life with the triune God begins as we confess the *Abba* of Jesus as our Father and the Son as our Lord — both by the Spirit's work. *Abba* and *Kurios* (Lord) on our lips is a sign of the Spirit's incorporating us into the family of God.<sup>177</sup>

There has been a proper wariness that Spirit-led people will lead the Church inappropriately to add beliefs and practices to the faith, especially works-based teaching. Smail rightly affirms that we cannot have Christianity plus, but we cannot have Christianity minus either, meaning to lose the Spirit.<sup>178</sup> The Spirit forms us in Christ, unveiling our faces to behold the glory of the Lord.<sup>179</sup> We need the undergirding of classical theology, but also the freedom of the Spirit that restores us to the Father and into the freedom of knowing and being known by Jesus by the Spirit. Otherwise, we rob the Spirit and the Church of the completing work of God's gifts to us, for us, and through us for the sake of the world.<sup>180</sup>

### **The Spirit Personalizes the Church**

The Holy Spirit is the center and source of God's personal activity, relating the Father and Son to us with an intimate distinction in being.<sup>181</sup> Smail affirms that the proper function of charismatic renewal is to call the Church to trinitarian

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<sup>176</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 145.

<sup>177</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 30.

<sup>178</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 146.

<sup>179</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.

<sup>180</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 151.

<sup>181</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 146.

renewal, engaged through biblical and theological study to guide us on the journey. We know where to go, but need the Spirit to bring a fresh opening to the Father and Son for a dynamic life together.<sup>182</sup> The Spirit reminds us that Jesus is the Christ who died for our sins and is the same one who pours out his Spirit to empower the witnessing life of the Church.<sup>183</sup> The Spirit facilitates the human side of the relationship with Jesus and his Father, bringing their love and power to active service, enlivening the Church here and now to experience the living God in the midst of our days.<sup>184</sup> With our propensity to focus on ourselves, we continually need to refocus on Father and Son, which is the essence of our repenting as we come home and follow Jesus afresh as new persons.

The first thing that the Spirit does for us is to restore the knowledge that we are children of the Father and to know his heart. The Spirit not only awakens us with the *Abba* cry, but testifies that we are children of the Father throughout life.<sup>185</sup> This opens our theology to align with the mission of Jesus, bringing the Father's love to us, as well as restoring us to his Father. Good Spirit theology reorients us to the forgotten Father. The gift of the Spirit is never an end in itself, but is a return to the simplicity of being a child with the Father of all love.<sup>186</sup> The Spirit gives glory to the Father through the Son, not just pointing to him, but revealing all the love and fulfillment in us so that we respond in gratitude to him.<sup>187</sup>

### **The Spirit Directs the Church to Jesus**

The Spirit recenters us on Jesus. Smail expresses gratitude to "Professor Torrance and the whole Barthian tradition ... for insisting that Christ has answered

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<sup>182</sup> Smail, "When Wright was Right," in *Challenging to Change*, 168.

<sup>183</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 58. See also Frank Macchia, *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer: Christology in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018) and *The Spirit-Baptized Church: A Dogmatic Inquiry* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 2021).

<sup>184</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 64.

<sup>185</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 41, 58.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>187</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 84-87.



for us when we have nothing to say for ourselves.”<sup>188</sup> This is central, but does not go as far as Smail wants to go, in seeing the Spirit at work in facilitating our response, enabled to say and act in obedient response by the Spirit.

Smail emphasizes that what Jesus did once and for all, the Spirit continues to work out in us here and now. This dimension of the Spirit’s work makes our joining to Jesus personal; we are corporately connected, revealing the Spirit’s work in our relating with one another as we focus on Jesus.<sup>189</sup>

The Spirit raises Jesus from the dead on Resurrection Morning, but Jesus’ ascension also marks the arrival of the Spirit, bringing Christ’s power and presence to the Church. Each interacts for the other in the life-giving mission of God. Then, the Spirit intercedes for us and builds the Church as the body of Christ, as the promise of what is to come, the “not-yet,” becomes “now poured out” in conjunction with Jesus’ ascension, and not in any way replacing Jesus.<sup>190</sup> This personal mediation continues. We need to become more aware of Jesus’ priestly role today, but also of the Spirit as Intercessor on our behalf and in our midst.

### **The Spirit Transforms Humans for Response**

The intersection of God with our personal humanity occurs as the Spirit brings a paradigm shift in our thinking. No longer do we trust our senses, arguments from human thinking about who we are, or mere observations to make sense of the world and our place in it. We are converted to align our thoughts with God’s wisdom. This change of mind comes as the Spirit gives us ears to hear and know who God is as revealed in Jesus, addressing us to make possible a personal knowing of the living God.<sup>191</sup>

Having received life from the Father, through the Son, who comes to us by the Spirit, we are prepared for life together. This means that, by the same Spirit,

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>189</sup> Smail, “When Wright was Right,” in *Challenging to Change*, 169.

<sup>190</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 123-24.

<sup>191</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 63.

we also offer ourselves daily through the Son to the Father.<sup>192</sup> This creates the responsive life of being known, and hence coming to know more fully the one who came seeking us. Pentecostals do well in receiving the Spirit, but need to follow the Spirit into the life of yielding to the love of God in worshipful obedience as an expression of freedom, not compliance to the law. The Spirit makes life fruitful, not slavish compliance.

Jesus brings us to a life of listening to the Father,<sup>193</sup> and the Spirit takes the things of Jesus and reveals them to us.<sup>194</sup> Thus, the ongoing life with the Father and Son is facilitated by communication that the Spirit brings to us.<sup>195</sup> The constructive element of the divine action brings us into communion through hearing and responding. The Son's communion with the Father is unbroken, but we must be brought to the Father by the Spirit through the mediation of the Son. As Christ received the Spirit in his humanity, so we receive the Spirit, who takes our broken humanity to share in God's eternal life even as we are in the space-time continuum.<sup>196</sup>

### **The Spirit Brings Personal Fulfillment**

In this theology of restoration by the collaboration of the triune persons, we are fulfilled as persons. The Son is called the Personalizing Person, but the Spirit also personalizes because the fullness of our humanity can only be restored by the personal engagement of God in redeeming our lost relation. God does not act independently of us or expect us to merely *theorize* how his work is effective. In his revelation to us, he is addressing us in person, and so the revelation becomes the

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<sup>192</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 116; see the Torrance quote showing him correcting and correlating East and West in rethinking with Pentecostals for a more satisfying theology and practice.

<sup>193</sup> "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me." - John 6:45 (NASB)

<sup>194</sup> "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you." - John 16:13 (NASB)

<sup>195</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 77.

<sup>196</sup> Purves, *Charismatic Movement*, 226. Purves looks to Torrance for this understanding as the fulfillment of trinitarian theology for charismatics.

reconciliation and we *become* what we were created to be — persons in covenantal relation, enjoying God's enduring love. Thus, in alignment with Torrance, Smail is affirming that the Spirit originates a person-creating movement in all of the inner-trinitarian relations. God's presence ultimately transforms us in personal encounters; enveloping us changes our being.<sup>197</sup>

The being of God that exists in relation describes the essence of personal being. Torrance calls this "onto-relational being," and this understanding is implicit in Smail's work as well.<sup>198</sup> Smail extends the category with the personological model, including the unity the Spirit creates within the Trinity to also extend to believers in the Church.<sup>199</sup> It follows that the healing holistic life of the Church must always begin with the work of the Spirit. God's eternal life appropriately finds expression through the Spirit's work in the Church and world. Smail is passionate about this outworking of theology in a shared life with the Spirit, saying,

For many people, myself among them, it has brought a new and continuing experience of the Holy Spirit — God in the present tense — who acts in here and now eventfulness in the lives of individuals and the fellowship of his Church, so that things are seen and heard which may make it plain that Jesus Christ is not two thousand years away in the past, remote and retired in heaven, or reserved for an apocalyptic future, but lives to keep his promises to all who turn in expectant faith towards him.<sup>200</sup>

The way forward is to pursue a path toward maturity. We need not emphasize speaking in tongues, but confess "Jesus is Lord." In him, we are united by the Spirit, growing in Christ and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit.<sup>201</sup> We are changed into Jesus' likeness as we experience his love and find the joy of glorifying

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<sup>197</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 158.

<sup>198</sup> 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: T&T Clark, 2020), 143-160.

<sup>199</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 187.

<sup>200</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 13.

<sup>201</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 21.

him in word and deed. This transformation is the Spirit's work. It is displayed in our reflection of Jesus' face as we are changed to be like the original, now a copy being made into his likeness.

Transformation is not our work; it is the mediating work of the Spirit, who does not change us individually, but in the renewing fire of relating to one who makes the difference.<sup>202</sup> This is no life of human spiritualizing; it is the dynamic of intimate, ongoing encounters. "God's Word is not just to be spoken, it has to be heard; God's grace is not just to be given, it has to be received."<sup>203</sup> The Spirit is actually related to and sustains all humanity; apart from him, humans could not be alive.<sup>204</sup>

### **The Spirit Brings Maturity**

Maturity begins with a basic acknowledgment of our dependence on God by his Spirit. We grow as we see, with Karl Barth, that the Spirit was given as the gift of the Father, through the Son, to empower God's people to be a witness in the world.<sup>205</sup> By the Spirit, we witness to the kingdom of God, for which Jesus had to go away and send his Spirit.<sup>206</sup>

Exploring life in the Spirit is not about human empowerment to reach God, but about participating in God's mission in the world.<sup>207</sup> The Holy Spirit is the basis of our Christian life; the stress must not be on human decisions. We do not make ourselves Christians or grow through our efforts. God's gracious action and revelation to us makes possible a human decision in response, enabled by God's will and act.<sup>208</sup> This is why it is so important to explore the person and work of the Spirit in a trinitarian context. Only with a thorough understanding of the work of the

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 24-29.

<sup>203</sup> Smail, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *Theology Beyond Christendom*, 91.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>205</sup> Smail, "Holy Spirit," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 424.

<sup>206</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 106

<sup>207</sup> Smail, "Holy Spirit," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 424.

<sup>208</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 83.

Spirit within the trinitarian life of God can we explore the transformation of persons. We cannot make ourselves holy; that is the exclusive initiative of the Spirit to whom we yield as flowers yield to the sun to become what they were made to be (sunflowers, in particular, turn their faces toward the sun all day).

In this process, the Spirit brings hope. The Spirit creates an atmosphere of hope, plenty, and effectiveness. This prompts his people to live in expectation, enthusiastic towards a life of eventfulness, not just inward experience.<sup>209</sup>

In this hope, the Spirit forms the life of the Church, the community that is instituted by the Son and constituted by the Spirit. The Church exists because its being is in him, and not our institutions. It is constituted by the Spirit in the witness that facilitates person-to-person relationships.<sup>210</sup> We receive what Christ has done and is doing, and are freed by the Spirit to respond, not by ourselves but for ourselves, with creativity that is faithful and relevant to the work of the Son and brings God's life to our contexts. We do not depart from Scripture and Sacraments as we call on the Spirit to bring us into *koinonia* with the Father through the Son, and also with one another. Exposition of the Word and celebration of the Sacraments need not be exhausting, but might open our ears to hear the heart of the Father, the voice of the Son, and the present, creative wisdom of the Spirit at play in the intersection of our lives.

### **The Spirit Gifts the Church**

Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, we are surprised by the gift the Spirit brings. The Spirit's action created in Mary a response of praise and treasuring in her heart. She prayed with gratitude and anticipation for what God would do, submitting with joy as a servant. The future was born from Mary's womb, and Pentecost is on the horizon.

The Spirit places the hope of the world's future in the present, a place of vulnerability and anticipation that God will carry his purposes, begun by the Spirit,

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<sup>209</sup> T. A. Smail, *Praying with Paul* (Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007), 106-10.

<sup>210</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 191-3.

through to his intended end.<sup>211</sup> But at Pentecost, the Spirit's implantation of new life becomes a corporate receptivity, not a solitary ecstasy as for Mary.<sup>212</sup> The community becomes inseparably linked to the love of God for his people; an extension of that connection explodes in visible demonstrations of hospitality and sharing in spiritual, social, and economic expressions of giving.<sup>213</sup>

The Spirit coordinates his people together in an earthly workshop for the glory of Christ to be personally encountered and shared. This becomes a laboratory of experiencing, in person, that which can only be done in a corporate community. Each person engages as part of a body joined by the Spirit to create strength in the whole, and not any individual part by itself.<sup>214</sup> This is *koinonia* at its best — participation in the Holy Spirit.<sup>215</sup> In this space, there is not to be any domination by human authoritarian structures that inhibit the Spirit. There needs to be a *koinonarchy*, as I have described it, that is the rule of a shared life submitting to what is loving for each other in the presence and power of the Spirit.<sup>216</sup>

### **The Spirit Orients Us Forward**

The Spirit orients his people to the eschaton. Like Mary, we see the future as a glimpse of the Father's fulfilling work that begins in this moment. The Son has been placed inside to grow and become the one who reveals God in the world. The giving gift is within her, but cannot be contained by her as he grows and is revealed as the hope of the world.<sup>217</sup> Given as a seal to us, the Spirit does not just lock us inside, but rather, like a seal embossed with wax, creates in us characteristics that are impressed on us to instill his life, even while we remain distinct. The future is

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>214</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 126.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 127-29.

<sup>216</sup> Folsom, *Face to Face*, Volume 3, 360-64.

<sup>217</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 29.

being formed in us to conform to the person of Jesus.<sup>218</sup> The Spirit is not the Spirit of things as they are, but the Spirit of the future completing the purposes of God for his creation.<sup>219</sup>

We do not abandon the present in our life in the Spirit. We have access to the God of the eschaton, so that “[t]hrough the Spirit, who comes to us from God, we are given access to the truth about the ultimate reality of God, something we could not have reached on our own but which has been made accessible to us through what God has done in Jesus.”<sup>220</sup>

We are brought by the Spirit to discern the hidden things of God as prayer in the Spirit, just as Jesus experienced.<sup>221</sup> This requires a posture of listening so the Spirit might “reshape the content of our prayer to bring it into harmony with what Christ is praying on our behalf.”<sup>222</sup> We respond freely to what we hear as a gift of the Spirit. This is no life of repetition, only one of spontaneous, creative loving in conformity to all that is present of the Father and Son’s love for us, but also free to imaginative expressions that bring the blessings of the Spirit.<sup>223</sup> In our life of prayer, we act as those attuned to the voice of God, who, by the Spirit’s interceding, lifts and intertwines our humble prayers within the context of the prayers of Jesus on our behalf.<sup>224</sup> Additionally, Smail asserts that perhaps the gift of tongues expresses this stance of depending on the Spirit to pray for what is beyond ourselves. This is not a focus on our “gift” or prayer, but is a releasing to one who is able to do what is beyond us in intercession.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>220</sup> Smail, *Praying with Paul*, 17.

<sup>221</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 200. Smail references Luke 10:21, “At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, “I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.” (NASB)

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 212.

### **The Spirit Facilitates a Life of Prayer**

Having begun the life of prayer with the cry “*Abba*,” we find ourselves sustained and guided as we learn to listen. We have inherited the Spirit, who brings a constant and intimate communication that enables and sustains us even when we do not know how to pray.<sup>226</sup> Even the Lord’s Prayer is associated with the Spirit, as portrayed in Luke 11:1-4, and in Luke 11:13, Jesus invites the hearer, saying, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”<sup>227</sup> The Lord’s prayer both attunes us to Jesus’ dialog with the Father and leads to an invitation to the Spirit, who brings connection to its highpoint.<sup>228</sup>

### **The Spirit Brings Creativity**

From this communion comes the life of reflecting the Son by the Spirit’s work. Smail conceives the Spirit as an artist who casts the trinitarian love in new, endlessly redeeming contexts. This perfecting creativity takes what exists and moves it to what it is intended to be in its fullness. Like the resurrection, this involves ongoing events of new beginnings, including revolutions and overcoming injustices, oppression, detachment, and disintegration of what happens at the cultural and personal level.

The Father’s initiating love seeks to cast out all fear and set captives free. We are called to mirror what has come to us by the Spirit. This may bring controversy as we engage our culture, as it did for Jesus when walking by the Spirit. But Smail believes we must not let the creativity born of the Spirit die due to laziness, fear, corruption, or the self-centeredness that marks our age. Freedom comes in the life of love empowered by the Spirit.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 144.

<sup>227</sup> Luke 11:13 (NASB).

<sup>228</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 167.

<sup>229</sup> T. A. Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in our Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 186-200.



The call is to live a life tuning in to the Spirit by reading the Bible; embracing the sacraments; worshipping in Jesus' Church, with all its historical roots; and developing discernment to know Jesus' voice and follow the Spirit's wisdom.<sup>230</sup>

### **The Spirit Calls Us to Discernment**

Whatever it has meant to be charismatic or Pentecostal, it must come to mean conformity to Christ in ongoing connection with the Spirit.<sup>231</sup> This includes a proper theology as outlined by Torrance and Smail. But it also means actively being equipped and equipping others for God's mission in the world. This is not formal education; it is a developing sense that we have received forgiveness and reconciliation from God and may now offer this to each human we meet with a love born of the Spirit.<sup>232</sup> All of this learning must lead to a discernment that is faithful to the biblical gospel. For Smail, this is *the* neglected gift of the Spirit.<sup>233</sup> The ability to distinguish between what is authentic and inauthentic is critical for the demanding road of hearing the Spirit's word, including prophecy, and standing for all that is required of love and faithfulness to covenant love.<sup>234</sup>

Wisdom is especially important in discerning the spirits. Each church has its own identity that can confuse the issue. But faithfulness to the Spirit of God must set the final possibilities and limits. Claims must reflect the heart of the loving *Abba*. They must resonate with the transforming ministry of Jesus. The Spirit cannot be heard to act alone, only as the Spirit of Jesus and his Father.

Unholy spirits may include conservatism or restlessness that is anxious to change everything. There may be a spirit of complacency that refuses to challenge anything. A spirit of idolatry may cherish buildings, programs, or tradition more than the living God. There may be a spirit of thrill that loves new experiences more than what God is doing in and for the Church and world. The one Spirit comes with

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<sup>230</sup> Smail, *Praying with Paul*, 64-69.

<sup>231</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 196.

<sup>232</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 145.

<sup>233</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 164-65.

<sup>234</sup> Smail, "The Ethics of Exile and the Rhythm of Resurrection," in *On Revival*, 61.

many different forms of building the body and the persons who yield. What is constant is a faith in the God who is the source, and continually assessing whether words or plans echo from that epicenter. But Smail concludes that we must remain open to receive, as well as wise to follow within the guidance of the personal God we come to know.<sup>235</sup> We must stay in the realm of inspiration so that the inspirer, the Spirit, will work in us, the inspired, so that we remain distinct and yet aligned in obedient correspondence, marked by God's creativity.<sup>236</sup>

The Spirit must remain a Spirit of freedom or we have lost our bearings. The Spirit gives humans and whole communities new freedom that comes from sharing God's purposes. The objectivity of God's creation and reconciliation leads to redemption that becomes obvious in bearing the fruit of the Spirit in the community of faith as well as particular persons. Freedom is not independence; it is the interdependence of love that breaks down walls and builds in love. This is the context of the incorporation of humans into the mission of God by the Spirit in each place. This provides for the gifts of responsiveness to be shared with others.<sup>237</sup>

The gifts of the Spirit are the gifts of the Crucified. We have died with Christ and live now as those who live in the ministry of the resurrected Jesus by his Spirit. We are freed from the self-seeking, fearful bondage of the past, and now live in the mystery and power of the Spirit, who live by the faithfulness of the Son of God.<sup>238</sup> We now breathe Jesus' resurrection by his Spirit, both with the way God provides through creation, as with medicine, and also with divine works beyond human limitations.<sup>239</sup> In a similar manner, we are wise to employ language that people will "see and hear" as well as remain open to what can exceed our capacities, with tongues that speak to others of God's mighty acts in languages unknown to us, thus within a christological context as the Spirit imparts.<sup>240</sup> Smail concludes that

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<sup>235</sup> Smail, *Praying with Paul*, 97-105.

<sup>236</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 91.

<sup>237</sup> Smail, *Once and for All*, 161.

<sup>238</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 114.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-33.

there is no “law of tongues,” only the availability of the Spirit to open deep places in our being to praise God and to be present for others as a vehicle of God’s grace. All must follow the royal law of love.<sup>241</sup>

### **The Spirit and the Life of Worship**

Most distinctly, we must affirm that the Spirit gives us a life of worship. This is a life of intimacy through prayer and a gathered dynamic life within the body of Jesus.<sup>242</sup> Life is exchanged through releasing our past and opening to what the Spirit is doing. As we surrender what enslaves us, we enter into the hearing, sharing, and empowerment of the trinitarian God, who calls us to lives of empowered service.

Worship is the gift and work of the Spirit, not engaged through attempts of humans to reach God.<sup>243</sup> This affirms the Reformed emphasis on the initiating work of God. However, space is also created for humans to respond to the Spirit with creativity and freedom. All becomes a response to the gift that is a shared reality, God’s initiation of life and worship.

Liturgies in the Church ought not to replace the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. There certainly can be freedom and spontaneity within the framework of liturgy that continues to be Christ-centered. Embracing creative continuity with Christ by the Spirit means we tell the story and recite the ancient words. Additionally, we may allow for the Spirit to answer and express through us a life responsive to God’s initiative and to the rest of the community.

Smail sees the Spirit as a center of divine activity, bringing home the love of the Father and Son to God’s family.<sup>244</sup> The Spirit brings an authentic response to the biblical gospel in the present to enliven us again with gratitude for the communion we find.<sup>245</sup> Liturgy that is too ritualistic becomes boring and irrelevant,

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>242</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 199.

<sup>243</sup> Smail, “Holy Spirit,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, 424.

<sup>244</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 83-84.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 212.

except to the few who cling to the past. Worship that rejects liturgy disintegrates into self-indulgence, answering the cravings of people instead of the address of God.

There needs to be a tension between liturgical givenness and spiritual spontaneity.<sup>246</sup> But the center is focused on sharing the *Abba* cry of Jesus by the Spirit in an interflow of life, adopted into a relationship of prayer and worship where we become more fully ourselves as we share in the embracing life of Father and Son by the Spirit.<sup>247</sup> The modes of a life of worship may range from a gathered life of those who sing songs of intimacy and hushed reverence<sup>248</sup> to the freedom of singing in the Spirit with an unveiled heart of worship led by the Spirit's renewing work.<sup>249</sup>

Renewal has been at the center of the recent decades of the movement of the Spirit. This has been subdued by those who become preoccupied with self-focused individualism or superficiality. But renewal continues to impact the world through those who believe God is alive.<sup>250</sup> Where the Trinity is known and worshipped, the freedom of the Spirit ought to be embraced. Where the Spirit is held at bay, one may ask what is at play in the leading of the community. Who is leading and how? "It is the pneumatological element in the incarnate Christ that makes his humanity not only normative for but creatively empowering of ours."<sup>251</sup> His leadership is fulfilled in the power of the Spirit, as could be our own. In the sacraments, the Spirit whispers, "You are accepted."<sup>252</sup> Then personal union is established as a vine to the branch. An organic unity bears the fruit of what is provided from the larger whole, growing from the life-giving source.<sup>253</sup> We are

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<sup>246</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 114-16.

<sup>247</sup> Smail, *Forgotten Father*, 172.

<sup>248</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 110.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>250</sup> Smail, "The Ethics of Exile and the Rhythm of Resurrection," in *On Revival*, 60.

<sup>251</sup> Smail, "The Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity," in *Nicene Christianity*, 163.

<sup>252</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 35.

<sup>253</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 59-60.

given a choice that grapes do not have. We give ourselves to the one who has given all to us as we are awakened by the Spirit. We personally walk the way of love, having been found by love and walking in the Spirit in a response that could be called a life of worship.<sup>254</sup>

## Conclusion

The Holy Spirit is a neglected person in much academic theology and the life of the Church. Smail affirms,

I want to maintain more strongly than ever that the only hope of the Church is in new openness to the Holy Spirit who brings us into living contact with the Father and the Son. The charismatic movement as a thing in itself may well be almost over, but the renewal of the Church by the Holy Spirit has only just begun.<sup>255</sup>

The renewal of the Spirit must come as a trinitarian renewal.<sup>256</sup> It does no good to focus on one person of the Trinity without the whole. We need God, not just experiences of the Spirit, as though the two could be separated.<sup>257</sup> We need a right relation to the Spirit, not an abolition of the Spirit because of abuse.<sup>258</sup>

The call for a proper theology, as presented by Torrance and Smail, is one that brings a life of purpose in restoring relationships so humans may share the fullness of God's life.<sup>259</sup> We do not need better practices for the Church for renewal; we need theology to come to the rescue.<sup>260</sup> We need to seek God himself. This occurs as we are opened to the Father by the Spirit, drawn into communion with

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 213. Smail mentions in the footnote to this chapter that he is indebted to J. B. Torrance, who was his friend. J. B. wrote the masterful *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 1997).

<sup>255</sup> Smail, *The Forgotten Father*, 9-10.

<sup>256</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 164.

<sup>257</sup> Smail, "When Wright was Right," in *Challenging to Change*, 167.

<sup>258</sup> Smail, *Reflected Glory*, 96.

<sup>259</sup> Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 176.

<sup>260</sup> Smail, "When Wright was Right," in *Challenging to Change*, 167.

Christ by the Spirit, and find closeness with others by the Spirit. This is a life of personal transformation, a renewal where gifts are peripheral, and the Gift is the Spirit in Person and all that is opened for us by him.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Smail, *Charismatic Renewal*, 18-19.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SANCTIFICATION

**Don J. Payne, Ph.D.**

**Academic Dean/Professor of Theology, Denver Seminary**

don.payne@denverseminary.edu

**Abstract:** *Questions about the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian experience frequently take the form of questions about the role of the Spirit in sanctification, propelled by the assumption that sanctification refers to the work of God's grace that carries the Christian forward throughout life toward final glorification. Much confusion and controversy surrounding the Spirit's role in sanctification derives more specifically from the assumption that sanctification is virtually synonymous with transformation, frequently exhibited in the tendency to read sanctification into transformation texts where sanctification is not discussed. This tendency misdirects the question about the Spirit's role in sanctification. The biblical portrait treats sanctification as the divine act that places the Christian in a specific relationship to God's presence in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, a relationship that provides for and nourishes transformation in the ongoing Christian experience, in whatever way that transformation is experienced and interpreted phenomenologically.*

Though not known for giving primary or overt attention to the subject of the lived Christian experience, T. F. Torrance's theological work reflected a steady undercurrent of concern for how the understanding of God and God's ways with humanity affects the lived Christian experience. Torrance was deeply troubled by

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the deleterious effects of theological misconstruals on the lives of God's people.<sup>1</sup> He had much to say both about the Holy Spirit and about sanctification, though not perhaps addressing those theological loci or the linkage between them in ways characteristic of much popular writing on the Christian life. His thoughts on the matter (and perhaps he) will look over our shoulders as we seek insight on the Spirit's role in sanctification, sanctification being the doctrinal locus most often associated with the ongoing Christian experience and understood to be theologically subsequent to justification and experientially subsequent to conversion.

The question of the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification provides a diagnostic lens through which to view disagreements and confusion about the lived Christian experience — understood in terms of the pursuit of and growth in Christlikeness or holiness — that have long distinguished Christian traditions and beleaguered or confused Christians within those traditions. Those disagreements and confusions betray assumptions about sanctification that will be examined and challenged in due course, e.g., that human experiential phenomena constitute an appropriately central focal point as well as criteria for understanding both sanctification and the Holy Spirit's role in it. Admittedly, the Christian life is a life of active relationship that encompasses the range of phenomena associated with sentient agency. Yet a responsible engagement with the question of the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification must begin further upstream by identifying the proper theological starting point(s) and tracing out the line of questioning from there. First, however, we must review some assumptions that typically frame and animate much conversation about the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification. Then we will examine some key biblical texts to orient the discussion. Along the way we will draw increasingly upon T. F. Torrance's thought to illuminate a path through some of the disagreement.

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<sup>1</sup> One example of this concern was Torrance's frequent attention to how christological missteps regarding the hypostatic union of divine and human natures in one person lead to moralistic, burdensome, and anxious worship of God for having ignored or bypassed the divine grace which makes full salvation possible only because the Son of God bound himself in his divinity fully to our humanity. See *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), ch. 4.



## Contested Assumptions

Disagreements and confusion about the lived Christian experience, especially as related to the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification, often emerge from three assumptions that tend to build on each other in sequence. First, sanctification is frequently assumed to be at least roughly synonymous with what the New Testament writers refer to as "transformation," i.e., that sanctification is primarily a character or maturity concept that refers to a believer's level or degree of conformity to the image of Christ. This assumption is expressed in notions such as "progressive sanctification" or "entire sanctification" or "sanctification by faith." In each instance the question of the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification is essentially a question about the Spirit's role in the believer's ongoing experience of conformity to the image of Christ. Second, the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification — a linkage easy to demonstrate from the New Testament — not only serves but is essential to that work of transformation or character development.<sup>2</sup> Third, personal progress in transformation toward Christlikeness depends upon proper relationship to or engagement with the Holy Spirit for that process. That proper relationship would include correct understanding and expectations of how one's personal effort and intentionality relate to the Spirit's work for the transformation to occur, the nature or type of experiential outcomes to expect from the process, and recognition or assessment of the transformation process.

The third of those assumptions frequently constitutes the point of departure or fragmentation among traditions.<sup>3</sup> Perspectives range from passive to active in terms of how Christians are to relate to or depend upon the Holy Spirit for their sanctification. More passive approaches, such as found in "Keswick" spirituality, tend toward a more monergistic emphasis on conscious reliance on the Spirit to do the entire work of personal transformation. More active approaches, such as found

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<sup>2</sup> I address and challenge these assumptions in *Already Sanctified: A Theology of the Christian Life in Light of God's Completed Work* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> This is amply demonstrated by how the subject of sanctification is treated in works that provide multiple views on the subject with each representative responding to the others. See Donald L. Alexander, ed., *Christian Spirituality: Five Views on Sanctification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988) and Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

in Reformed spirituality, tend toward a more synergistic emphasis on the Christian's responsibility for disciplined pursuit of transformation while assuming the Holy Spirit's initiation, animation, and guidance of the process from behind the scenes.<sup>4</sup>

More passive approaches tend to insist that if sanctification (transformation) is the work of the Holy Spirit, it occurs as a result of faith in the Holy Spirit to do that work (Acts 26:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Sanctification is understood to come by faith monergistically in the same sense that justification is by faith and for the same reason; it is an act of God that only God can accomplish. Accordingly, it is assumed that conscious, intentional striving for transformation equates to an attempt to do what only God can do, inevitably resulting in frustration and failure to grow in the freedom and Christlikeness that only God can provide by grace through faith in the Holy Spirit to do the work. More active or synergistic approaches appeal to biblical texts that call believers to intentional, vigorous obedience (Philippians 2:12; 2 Peter 1:5-8), with the vicissitudes of the process being undergirded by and the outcomes of the process secured by the Holy Spirit. This comparison does not ignore the variations of emphasis found between these two poles in other theological traditions but serves only to illustrate how the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification is not uniformly understood and how different understandings of that role have consequences for daily Christian experience.<sup>5</sup>

So, what needs clarification about the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification? If there is a theological impasse between sanctification traditions, what is the nature of that impasse? We can only gain clarity on the Spirit's role in sanctification if we are clear about the nature of sanctification. The resulting theological focal point that

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<sup>4</sup> J.I. Packer, speaking from a Reformed perspective and criticizing Keswick spirituality, offers this analysis in "Keswick' and the Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification," *Evangelical Quarterly* 27 (1955), 153-67. Steven Barabas offered an exposition and apologetic for Keswick spirituality in *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1952).

<sup>5</sup> The comparative stories of J.I. Packer and Hannah Whitall Smith provide curious anecdotal evidence of how both monergistic and synergistic approaches can be experienced in opposite ways by different individuals. See Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (Chicago: Revell, 1883) and Alister McGrath, *To Know and Serve God: A Biography of J I Packer* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997).

emerges better illuminates subsidiary theological questions related to Christian experience.<sup>6</sup> David Powlison summarizes those questions well.

How do we explain the dynamics of sanctification? How do forgiven sinners change? How do newborn saints learn to trust and love? What is the connecting link between what we say we believe and how we live? ... [H]ow do [people] actually change? Where do they get stuck? What does change — and doesn't change? What is the process like? What are the typical ups and downs? How do you explain the advances and the regressions? ... What is the dynamic by which receiving grace becomes giving grace?<sup>7</sup>

Questions such as these understandably befuddle and beleaguer serious Christians in their own journeys and as they seek pastorally to nurture Christian maturity in others. Proper as these questions are, they can only be properly and fruitfully engaged from theological starting points about the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification that have not always been adequately clarified.

A key argument in this essay will be that confusion amongst theological traditions about the nature of the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification results when questionable assumptions about the nature of sanctification serve as the starting point for the conversation. At this point the assumptions mentioned above come back into view because each in some way links the Holy Spirit's role to the Christian's experience of transformation.

## **What Is Sanctification Through the Spirit?**

Some theological backtracking is in order. A survey of theological treatments of sanctification reveals that sanctification/holiness language has come to be used routinely to denote and interpret biblical texts that speak of transformation.<sup>8</sup> It

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<sup>6</sup> I am intentionally drawing upon Michael Polanyi's epistemological paradigm of focal and subsidiary awareness to illustrate this point. See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 55-57.

<sup>7</sup> David Powlison, *How Does Sanctification Work?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 27-28.

<sup>8</sup> Payne, *Already Sanctified*, 7.

must be noted, however, that the words “sanctification” (or, generally “consecration” in the Old Testament) and “holiness” — all derived from the *qadosh* and *hagios* word groups — do not generally refer to a growth process but to a decisive act of God that has already been accomplished and that both initiates and animates transformation. Far more is implied by this decisive act than is typically conveyed by the familiar notion of “positional” or even “definitive” sanctification.<sup>9</sup>

If we accept the premise that the New Testament’s call to transformation, i.e., progressive growth in grace toward conformity to the image of Christ, is somehow related to sanctification (I would argue that it is dependent on sanctification) but not simply synonymous with sanctification, resisting the tendency to read sanctification (and thus, the Holy Spirit’s role) too quickly into transformation texts, then we are freed to reexamine afresh the texts that actually speak of the Holy Spirit’s role in sanctification. The picture that emerges may unsettle some long-held presuppositions about sanctification but it also may provide a more expansive vision of the Holy Spirit’s work and as a result breathe some fresh air into the Christian experience, regardless of the theological tradition that has shaped our thinking about the lived Christian experience with the Holy Spirit.

### **Textual Anchor Points – Old Testament**

A brief overview of a few salient texts will mark a trajectory on which consecration is consistently a preparation for God’s presence and God’s purposes. When Moses has his life-altering encounter with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3), God declares the place where he was standing as “holy” — not Moses himself but the space he occupied in God’s immediate presence. In Exodus 19 God instructs Moses to consecrate the people of Israel before they come to meet with God the following day. They could not survive such proximity to the divine presence in an unconsecrated or unholy state. The tabernacle and later the temple were those designated physical spaces — holy places — where God’s presence was particularly manifest for the sake of dealing with the people of Israel through the priests. Bernie A. Van De Walle highlights the divine presence as the defining factor in the holiness of the temple.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 41-71. See also David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

That which made the temple holy — indeed that which made the temple *the temple* — was nothing other than the presence of the Spirit of God. Apart from the Spirit's presence, it was just a building.... Since "temple" refers not to a building but to a place (any place) where the Spirit of God resides, the church can be truly called "the temple."<sup>10</sup>

The claim that God's presence made a space holy is not novel. Yet, that defining feature of holiness, consecration, and sanctification seems to have been underdeveloped as theologies of sanctification have evolved over the history of the Church. As Kyle Strobel remarks, "Few doctrines have floated free from their biblical mooring as completely as the doctrine of sanctification."<sup>11</sup>

Early in Israel's history a consistent connection is evident between consecration and anointing. This occurred with those appointed as priests and with the inanimate objects, such as their garments, used in the Lord's service (Exodus 28:41; 29:21; Leviticus 8:10-12; Numbers 7:1). The theological connection between consecration and anointing takes more explicit shape throughout canonical development as the Spirit is later seen as the agent of anointing for service (1 Samuel 16:13; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38). The Spirit's work of consecration and anointing prepares people and even objects for God's presence and God's service. While consecration has clear moral and ethical implications, it does not as such alter the properties or character of its objects, whether human or inanimate.

### **Textual Anchor Points – New Testament**

In 1 Corinthians 6:11 Paul identifies the Spirit as the divine agent who has washed, justified, and sanctified believers. Here the Holy Spirit's work in sanctification is portrayed in the same accomplished sense as washing (cleansing from sin) and justification. All three works of the Spirit make the believer new before God with the clear implications (in the overall context) of newness in relation

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<sup>10</sup> Bernie A. Van De Walle, *Rethinking Holiness: A Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 139.

<sup>11</sup> Kyle Strobel, endorsement, *Already Sanctified*, back cover.

to each other. What the Holy Spirit does in sanctification provides for and obliges the believer to live into a different way of life.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 offers a somewhat more complex picture. Close examination reveals a theological picture in continuity with the pattern of the Spirit's role in sanctification that began in the Old Testament. Paul states,

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

Paul identifies two results from the Spirit's work: freedom and transformation into Christ's image with ever-increasing glory. Though he does not explicitly mention sanctification in this text, the assumption that sanctification is synonymous with transformation prompts some to draw upon this text to support the notion of progressive sanctification. Yet, the Spirit's work in giving this freedom actually reflects what sanctification accomplishes through the ongoing work of the Spirit.

The context leading up to this text speaks of Moses's veil that protected people from the immediacy of God's glory and that had obscured the true significance of what God had revealed. That veil is removed when we turn to the Lord. We are now free through the Spirit to stand in the immediate presence of God; to "see" God in a sense that God's people could not do prior to Christ's completed work and the pouring out of the Spirit. We are free to "see" God in this way because we see God through Jesus, and that by the Spirit. In view here is the work that the Spirit does in sanctification to prepare us to be in God's presence, which then with the removal of the veil allows God's glory to transform us. The primary focus of the Holy Spirit's work is to bring us into the immediate, interactive presence of God by placing us in Christ. As a result, the Spirit effects our transformation through being in God's presence.

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<sup>12</sup> All Scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version, updated edition (National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 2022).

Paul states in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, "But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth." Here the Spirit's sanctifying work is clearly and directly instrumental in salvation, including God's act of choosing. Sanctification through the Spirit is an act related to our beginnings in Christ. Paul's statement here fits nicely with the familiar theological category of "positional" sanctification, which often provides a theological placeholder to acknowledge texts that associate sanctification with salvation without having to follow the tendency of late medieval Roman Catholicism to fold sanctification into justification in a way that makes justification dependent on becoming morally worthy of justifying grace. Unfortunately, the only soteriological significance attributed to sanctification in many Protestant theologies is through the category of "positional" sanctification, which has typically been treated as secondary to sanctification as progressive or something yet to be fully realized in the believer's experience. With recognition that the Spirit is the agent of sanctification, the Spirit's agency is then seen primarily in transformation; hence, the ongoing controversy and confusion over the Spirit's role in sanctification.

The Apostle Peter places sanctification in similar soteriological light in 1 Peter 1:1-2, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood." Here, as in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, the Spirit's sanctifying work is connected to salvation, though somewhat more directly and clearly in relationship to God's choosing. Peter's reference to "sprinkled with his blood" clearly aligns with the Old Testament (e.g., Leviticus 16:19; Joshua 7:13) and the book of Hebrews (e.g., 9:13; 10:2-10) in connecting consecration/sanctification with cleansing.

In Titus 3:5 Paul highlights renewal as a work of the Spirit and brings that together with the theme of washing — a work he relates to the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 6:11. Though he does not use the language of sanctification here, renewal is commonly seen as a reference to progressive sanctification;

sanctification depicting the process of growth in Christlikeness.<sup>13</sup> Whether this establishes the Spirit as the agent of transformation depends on whether renewal refers to the believer's ongoing growth. In John 3 Jesus restricts regeneration to birth (*gennethe*) by the Spirit. In Colossians 3:10 Paul speaks of renewal (*anakainoumenon*) in the sense of ongoing growth into the image of Christ. Yet, one must assume that this renewal and transformation are synonymous with or explanatory of sanctification in order to equate the Spirit's role in sanctification with the process and experience of conformity of the believer to the image of Christ.

This survey obviously does not address some familiar texts often understood as depicting sanctification as a process (e.g., Romans 6:19) or as a reality yet to be realized in the Christian experience (1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:14-16). Without ignoring the important themes that complete the overall biblical profile of sanctification from these texts, it must be emphasized that the overwhelming majority of biblical uses of sanctification/holiness language speak of an accomplished reality that the biblical writers routinely appeal to as the basis for the more imperatival and future dimensions.<sup>14</sup>

## Theological Implications

This brief overview displays a pattern in which sanctification is first and definitively a work of God. Michael Allen remarks that "all creaturely holiness is communicated holiness in the same way that creaturely life is communicated life."<sup>15</sup> All experiential aspects or implications of sanctification are derivative from and responsive to God's work in sanctification. Furthermore, the divine act of sanctifying occurs through the

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<sup>13</sup> Anthony Hoekema, "The Reformed Perspective," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 67.

<sup>14</sup> It should also be noted that conventional interpretations of these texts should not be taken for granted. On Romans 6:19 see Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 156-57, 196. On 1 Thessalonians 5:23 see Nijay K. Gupta, *1-2 Thessalonians* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 114-15. On Hebrews 12:14 see Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 367. On 1 Peter 1:14-16 see John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 362.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Allen, *Sanctification*, *New Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 87.



agency of the Holy Spirit as integral to salvation and is not merely subsequent to salvation in a developmental sense. Ivor J. Davidson observes,

[T]he theology of sanctification will inevitably go astray if it begins anywhere other than with the comprehensiveness of the gospel's announcement as we encounter it from the first: in Christ by the Spirit. If sanctification seems an oppressive theme, always existing in some degree of tension with the message of justification, forever threatening to cramp our Christian freedom, spoil our present joy and challenge our future hope — if it is a matter only of plodding asceticism, a perpetual struggle for spiritual brownie points, a technology of ascent whose benefits continually elude our grasp — it may well be that we have commenced our thinking in the wrong place; with human saintliness rather than with the God who makes saints, and with our own ideas about spiritual eminence rather than with sanctity as defined in God's prevenient movement toward us.<sup>16</sup>

The claim that sanctification is a divine act does not deny or dismiss the importance of human response, human experience, or growth processes. Rather, it places the human experiential phenomena — cognitive subjectivities such as desire and intentionality — in proper relationship to the divine act, insisting that those phenomena be understood in light of the nature of the divine act.

### **Sanctification as a Trinitarian Act**

As a divine act sanctification is specifically a Trinitarian act which follows specific christological contours by means of the Holy Spirit. T. A. Noble rightly points us to the Holy Spirit's role in Jesus' sanctification, from his conception by the Spirit as he entered and sanctified humanity on our behalf to his obedience to the Father throughout his life and even unto death. "[H]is obedience was *in the power of the sanctifying Spirit*. So as a human being ... it is *in the power of the Spirit* that he goes obediently to the cross to perfect his self-sacrifice, his offering of himself to

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<sup>16</sup> Ivor J. Davidson, "Gospel Holiness," in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice*, ed. Kelly Kopic (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 193.

the Father in love and obedience."<sup>17</sup> Such a trinitarian starting point calibrates the trajectory, the character, and the proportions of all further considerations of sanctification. The Spirit's role in sanctification is oriented toward the Son with reference to the Father. All of the Spirit's transformative acts in human persons, including those associated with sanctification, are defined by what the Spirit did with respect to Jesus in his ministry to the Father on our behalf.

As the Sanctified One, Jesus worked out his saving obedience in the power of the Spirit in his atonement for sin. Torrance notes,

In him the Holy Son of God was grafted on to the stock of our fallen human existence, and in him our mortal and corrupt human nature was assumed into union with the Holy Son of God, so that in Jesus, in his birth and sinless life, in his death and resurrection, there took place a holy and awful judgment on our flesh of sin, and an atoning sanctification of our unholy human existence. It was only through such atonement that God in all his Godness and holiness came to dwell in the midst of mortal, sinful man.<sup>18</sup>

Torrance's connection between sanctification and atonement mirrors the Levitical motifs of consecration as cleansing for the sake of being in God's presence.

### **Sanctification as a Christo-Pneumatological Act**

The christological orientation of the Spirit's sanctifying work takes shape in us further as we are adopted in Christ and united with Christ. The implications of 1 Corinthians 1:30 take on vast proportions in this regard. "In contrast, God is why you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Paul's affirmation, along with Jesus' prayer for

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<sup>17</sup> T. A. Noble, *Holy Trinity, Holy People: The Historic Doctrine of Christian Perfecting* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 184, 186 (emphases Noble's). Noble, like T. F. Torrance, follows the Cappadocian argument that Christ entered fallen human nature in order to sanctify it on our behalf. Torrance states, "[T]he assumption of our corrupted nature is at the same time a healing, sanctifying and renewing of it in Christ, so that the very nature through which the advance (*προχώρησις*) of sin took place might be the nature through which righteousness is exhibited." See *Theology in Reconciliation*, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 241.

his disciples' sanctification and statement about his self-sanctification for the sake of their sanctification in John 17:17-19, seem rarely to play the pivotal role in experiential questions about sanctification and the disagreements about how to answer them. Yet, they provide a keyhole through which to view the divine act of sanctification *in Christ* that then sheds light on those experiential questions.

To be adopted into Christ, united with Christ, sanctified in Christ — to have Christ as one's holiness — is not merely a "positional" status but a reality brought about by the life-giving Spirit, who is anything but passive in our lives.<sup>19</sup> Sanctification by the Spirit places us in the presence of the living God through Jesus Christ and thereby sweeps us up into God's grand purposes (John 15:1-8). The biblical narrative is punctuated with vignettes of those whose lives undergo profound personal transformation and are put into service by being brought into the presence of the living God, e.g., Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar (Genesis 15-18), Moses (Exodus 3), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), and Saul (Acts 9). Scripture offers a variety of exhortations, descriptions, and images for that transformation process<sup>20</sup> but never fully explains the inner mechanics — the "how" — of that process, which is the question of intense concern behind varying theological approaches to the Spirit's role in sanctification outlined in the beginning of this essay. Far more clear and significant is the Spirit's sanctifying role in bringing us into Christ, i.e., into the transforming presence of the living God.

God's presence does indeed launch and continue a profound transformation process, though focusing on the experiential nature of the process tends to mistake, in Polanyi's terms, subsidiary awareness for focal awareness and thus either obscure or distort what is subsidiary that can only be seen properly when viewing the deeper image.<sup>21</sup> John Webster provides a christological corrective so as

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<sup>19</sup> I argue elsewhere that the language of "positional" sanctification can too easily convey formal, static connotations that overlook the pneumatological dynamic involved, which dynamic is both requisite and intrinsically animating for transformation into Christlikeness. See Payne, *Already Sanctified*, 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> For example, 2 Peter 1:5-9 highlights intentional effort in response to God's promise, power, glory, goodness, and cleansing. 2 Corinthians 1:5-9 points to the transformative role of suffering. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 suggests that something about residing in God's presence and seeing God in truth has a transformative effect.

<sup>21</sup> Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 97-99.

to show how subsidiary (though still important) concerns such as transformation and the subjective aspects of personal agency cannot stand as the primary focal points of the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification.

By the personal operation of the Spirit, that which God wills and accomplishes with sovereign freedom and effectiveness comes to be the actual condition of the Christian's existence: no longer an abstract state of affairs but an objective reality which gathers the Christian into itself. 'In' the Spirit, elected and accomplished sanctification is made effectual as the Christian's own most personal reality.<sup>22</sup>

'Sanctification in the Spirit' means: it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And 'Christ lives in me' means: by the Spirit's power I am separated from my self-caused self-destruction, and given a new holy self, enclosed by, and wholly referred to, the new Adam in whom I am and in whom I act.<sup>23</sup>

Outside the parameters of what sanctification means "in Christ" those subsidiary concerns inevitably expand to weight and proportions that they have not the foundation to bear without distortion.

Webster's contention implies that the appropriate orienting question about the Spirit's role in sanctification is not about the psychological "mechanics" of the interface between personal effort and the Spirit's work in transformation (which leaves us endlessly squabbling about synergism v. monergism). The proper starting point rather is the holiness of Christ which the Spirit increasingly draws us into and makes real in our lives, i.e., integrates with our subjectivity (our values, decisions, commitments, habits, etc.), by prompting our efforts (e.g. practices, disciplines), encouraging and reinforcing them, bringing fruit from them, and thus bringing Christ's full humanness *coram Deo* into our humanness *coram Deo*, experientially realizing our personal identity in and through his identity without displacing our

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<sup>22</sup> John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 83. Readers of Torrance will recognize Webster's reference to one of Torrance's favorite texts, Galatians 2:20, to which Torrance vigorously and repeatedly appeals in contending for the work that Christ does for us vicariously.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

identity. This Christo-centric orientation of the Spirit's role in sanctification helps differentiate genuinely Christian formation from the broader, though significant, realm of human growth, development, and change that are easily and problematically mistaken for sanctification.

The Christo-centric orientation of sanctification is a theme to which Torrance gives recurring attention and elaboration, poignantly bringing together the soteriological aspects that have often been theologically separated from sanctification. Yet in bringing these elements together Torrance illuminates the dynamic and animating character of sanctification through the Spirit for the Christian experience.

From beginning to end it is through the *holiness* of Jesus that we are redeemed and regenerated. Therefore when the Holy Spirit comes to us as the Agent of our renewal he comes not only as the Holy Spirit of the one eternal God but as the Spirit mediated through Christ Jesus and charged with his divine-human holiness. He renews us by drawing us within the self-consecration of Christ made on our behalf and by assimilating us into his holiness. The Holy Spirit renews only through sanctification. If Jesus himself was raised from the dead according to the Spirit of Holiness, it cannot be otherwise with us. It cannot be otherwise with our worship: renewal may come only through holiness, regeneration only through sanctification.<sup>24</sup>

Since the Spirit's work is tied to Christ, the Spirit is obviously involved in our sanctification inasmuch as Jesus is our sanctification — 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30. Such Christo-centric sanctification, for Torrance, brings sanctification through the Spirit into closer alignment with the overall saving act of God, contra multiple currents within Protestant theologies that have insisted on discrete soteriological categories in which sanctification is the experience of transformation in Christlike character, theologically and chronologically subsequent to God's saving work in atonement and justification.

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<sup>24</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 250-51.

### **Sanctification Through the Spirit as a Soteriological Act**

When Torrance reins the sanctification conversation back into soteriology christologically and through the Spirit, he challenges the move within second generation Reformed theology to correct a problem within late medieval Roman Catholicism with a theological solution that simply created a different problem, i.e., the problem of improperly associating sanctification with the process of Christian growth and living, and thus asking the wrong set of questions about the Holy Spirit's role in that process.

That aspect of justification tended to drop out of sight when Protestant scholastic theology began to operate with an *ordo salutis* in which it assigned justification and sanctification to successive and different stages in a process of salvation. In the New Testament itself, however, sanctification or consecration in Christ (for the two words express the same thing) is spoken of in the perfect tense. Christ has already consecrated or sanctified himself for our sakes, so that we are already consecrated or sanctified in him — therefore sanctification or consecration is imputed to us by his free grace just like justification. But it would be a mistake to think of these as two different things, for in the Johannine literature and in the Epistle to the Hebrews the words "sanctification" and "consecration" correspond closely to the Pauline "justification" — they have their special nuance, without doubt, for they are more closely associated than "justification" with the priestly work of Christ, but it is the same reality, the same verity, to use Knox's term, which they describe.<sup>25</sup>

He goes on in this passage to claim, via Knox, that "justification, regeneration, sanctification flow out of *adoption*."<sup>26</sup> This, of course, depends on the more comprehensive understanding of Jesus' sanctification that Torrance articulates, drawing on Gregory of Nazanzus, in which Jesus entered the entirety

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 157-58.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 158.

of the human experience — including fallen nature — in order to redeem it fully.<sup>27</sup> Such full assumption of the humanness that he set out to redeem serves as a crucial backdrop for his sanctification of himself for our sake, as he stated in John 17.

Torrance vividly pulls together these threads of pneumatology, Christology, sanctification, and redemption.

The Holy Spirit comes to us only through him as the Spirit of Holiness, the Spirit of Redemption, and the Spirit of Glory. He comes to us from the inner life of Jesus as the Spirit in which he gained the victory over sin and temptation, as the Spirit in which he gained the victory over sin and temptation, as the Spirit in which he brought the divine holiness to bear upon our flesh of sin, sanctifying and perfecting in himself the very nature which he took from us, and therefore he comes in all the richness of the divine human holiness of Christ. He comes to us from the triumphant obedience and victory of Christ in his Cross and Resurrection, as the Spirit clothed with mighty, redemptive acts transmitting the energy of Christ's risen and glorified Humanity, and as the Spirit of him who has entered into the new life and inherited all the promises of God, and therefore he comes in all the transforming power of the Saviour and Redeemer of men.<sup>28</sup>

The Holy Spirit's role in sanctification, Torrance makes clear, is a work of renewal toward God in and through Jesus Christ, in which the reality of Jesus' vicarious and redemptive entry fully into fallen, alienated, condemned humanness is made real and available to persons through the adoption and union with Christ that the Spirit effects.

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<sup>27</sup> "[T]he Cappadocians were able to take even more seriously the Pauline teaching that Christ took upon himself fallen human nature, 'the flesh of sin', 'the body of death', while at the same time sanctifying and recreating it." - Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 155.

<sup>28</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 248.

### **Sanctification Through the Spirit as a Transformative Act**

Renewal, as Torrance refers to it, could easily be construed as the ongoing work of transformation that has come to be so closely associated with — often even treated as synonymous with — sanctification. However, Torrance's presentation of this renewal offers a slightly different nuance and with significant implications. When he states, "It is to participate in the actualised holiness of Jesus who sanctified himself on our behalf that we might be sanctified in him, in reality,"<sup>29</sup> his emphasis on "actualization" and "in reality" certainly implies that transformation in some sense results from Christ's sanctifying work. Yet his insistence that "[t]here is no separate activity of the Holy Spirit in revelation or salvation in addition to or independent of the activity of Christ, for what he does is to empower and actualise the words and works of Christ in our midst as the words and works of the Father,"<sup>30</sup> keeps the primary focal point of the Spirit's work in sanctification on what happens *in Christ*. Considerations about the nature of the transformation experience, experientially and phenomenologically, seem not to have been Torrance's primary concern and, in light of how he articulates the Spirit's role in sanctification, may well have loomed for him as a dangerous, anthropocentric diversion from the christological anchor point of the Spirit's sanctifying work.

When Torrance uses transformation language he does so with reference to our participation in the sanctified humanity of Christ. He speaks affirmingly of how Cyril of Alexandria described the effects of the Incarnation on human nature not as transubstantiation but "a transformation of it as through the Spirit it is made to participate in the renewed and sanctified humanity in Christ."<sup>31</sup> Such participation in Christ by the Spirit can easily be seen in Scripture as having transformative effects on our lives (2 Corinthians 3:14-18). The sanctification or holiness that resides in Christ and becomes ours in Christ through the Spirit constitutes the basis for transformation. Romans 12:1-2, a text commonly used to support the doctrine of progressive sanctification, actually presents holiness as the precondition or basis for

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<sup>29</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 196.

<sup>31</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 162.



transformation. We can experience transformation only having first presented ourselves to God as holy.

How, though, is that transformation to be understood? What is it? What should be expected of it experientially? The fruit of the Spirit, as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23, condenses many of the character traits that commonly populate the profile of discipleship to which theologies of sanctification orient themselves. Not infrequently, thoughtful Christians will observe to their confusion and consternation that these character traits are observable in non-Christian people just as easily and frequently as in Christians. What, then, makes them unique as evidence of the Holy Spirit's work?

What sets these fruit apart as works of the Spirit is not phenomenological and ontological but christological. Again, Torrance's christological framing of sanctification by the Spirit provides clarification for this type of question. With Eastern Orthodoxy in view he addresses the type of change that the Spirit effects as we exist in Christ.

[T]he Athanasian doctrine of *theosis* or *theopoiesis* through the Spirit, in which we are sanctified, renewed and enlightened through adoption in the incarnate Son to be sons of God, does not import any inner deification of our human nature, but the assuming of us into the sphere of the direct and immediate activity of God himself in such a way that our human being is brought to its *teleiosis* in relation to the Creator and we find our real life hid with Christ in God.<sup>32</sup>

In elaborating on Athanasius' view of the Spirit, Torrance places the focus of the Spirit's work on how the Spirit draws the Christian into proximity to God and God's activity so that any change that is brought about in the Christian is understood in that relation. Interestingly, he does not elaborate on the nature of that change (perhaps Torrance would say that it would be dangerous to try to develop it) any further than to speak of the Christian's life as reoriented toward its true purpose.

Any discussion of Torrance's view of the Spirit's role in sanctification will be incomplete without mention of the ecclesial dimensions of that work. To be

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 234.

sanctified in Christ is not merely or even primarily an individual matter but is to be sanctified into the body of Christ. He refers to “the sanctifying mission of the Spirit in establishing the people of God as the Body of Christ.”<sup>33</sup> He also speaks of “the sanctification of the Church through Christ and in the Spirit whereby it participates in the eternal life of the Triune God.”<sup>34</sup> Here Torrance clearly sees a core function or role of the Spirit in sanctification as drawing the Church into God’s life, which could be another way of saying it draws the Church into the immediate presence of God.

## Conclusion

No small amount of mystery still resides in the subject of the Holy Spirit’s role in sanctification. While sanctification as a work of the Holy Spirit is a clear and recurring theme, we are still without clear answers to some puzzling questions, many of which emerge from assumptions that have been superimposed on the topic. In reaction to the way sanctification was treated in late medieval Roman Catholic theology, some Reformation traditions have treated sanctification as a second and subsequent act of God.<sup>35</sup> This helped pave the way for sanctification to become an umbrella term for the ongoing experience of Christian growth and discipleship, whatever variations exist in how that experience is described and understood to iterate by different traditions. Since the Holy Spirit is clearly presented as the divine agent of sanctification, at least in the New Testament, the question of the Spirit’s role in sanctification is commonly simply another way of asking about the Spirit’s role in that ongoing experience of growth and discipleship, i.e., transformation. This presents yet another example of the methodological importance of examining our assumptions and making sure that our questions fit the nature of the case.

A reorientation to the doctrine of sanctification and specifically the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification begins with a recalibration. As Oliver O’Donovan clarifies

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>35</sup> Admittedly, this is a generalization that encompasses numerous variations. For a more detailed treatment of how this reaction iterated through various Protestant theological traditions see my *Already Sanctified*, 13-38.

when speaking about justification and sanctification, “There is not one work of God and then a second, but two points of purchase of one work, representative and incorporated aspects of our solidarity with the Redeemer through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>36</sup> Clarification about the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification begins with a proper reincorporation of the doctrine of sanctification into soteriology, rescuing it from the ancillary space of “Christian living.”<sup>37</sup>

The reorientation continues with a clarification that the composite and consistent witness of Scripture is that sanctification, effected by the Holy Spirit, has far more to do with being fitted for the presence of God in Jesus Christ and fitted for service to God through Jesus Christ. Ethical, characterological, and transformative implications of sanctification are profound but derivative — not the central focus — of what it means for the Holy Spirit to sanctify people. As Richard Lints observes, “Holiness is not about the changes that the Spirit effects in the life of the church, but about the presence of the Holy Spirit himself.”<sup>38</sup>

An initial navigational miscalculation has occurred when the Holy Spirit’s role in sanctification is explored from assumptions derived from experiential or phenomenological starting points, i.e., to understand how the Spirit effects spiritual transformation. That is not to imply that the Spirit is not involved in Christian transformation. Most certainly, the Spirit is so involved. Rather, transformation into Christ’s image emerges as the effects of what the Scripture clearly and predominantly portrays as the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification — to prepare people for and bring them into the presence of the living God, then to equip them for acceptable service to God. The Holy Spirit — the One whose holiness is the holiness of God — does all this in expression of the relational life of the triune God, toward the Father and through the Son. Christology provides both the telos of the Spirit’s work in sanctification and the defining calibrations of that work from the

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<sup>36</sup> Oliver O’Donovan, *Entering into Rest: Ethics as Theology*, pt. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 75.

<sup>37</sup> This relegation is illustrated by years of personal experience with a prominent academic society in which academic paper proposals on sanctification are consistently placed in sections on “Spiritual Formation” and never in “Systematic Theology.”

<sup>38</sup> Richard Lints, “Living by Faith — Alone?” in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice*, 46.

outset. When those navigational calibrations are underattended the work of the Spirit in sanctification is reduced to its iterative effects and the overall doctrine of sanctification takes on disproportions from being shaped more by anthropology than by Christology and soteriology.

In even his most intense scholarly work T. F. Torrance reflects a consistent if implicit concern for the lived Christian experience and how theology affects it. While he did not participate in the sanctification discussions and controversies that have characterized much evangelical literature in the twentieth century, his observations about the Holy Spirit and sanctification stand as a rather prophetic recalibration of the doctrine to its biblical origins. His relentless attention to the vicarious humanity of Christ and everything that entails for the Christian through the Holy Spirit provides a framework in which the work of the Spirit in sanctification is recaptured and reconnected to its animating source. In that sanctifying christological connection, created and sustained through the Spirit, we find our lives — our true selves and purpose — in the presence of the living, Holy One. That will transform us even if the process and phenomena of the transformation experience vary.

**CHRIST, THE TRUEST DISCIPLE:**

**J. B. Torrance's Vision of Worship Applied Towards a Grace-Filled,  
Trinitarian Understanding of Discipleship**

**Dr. Kristen Deede Johnson, Ph.D.**

**Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs, G.W. and Edna Haworth  
Professor of Educational Ministries and Leadership, Western Theological  
Seminary**

kristen.johnson@westernsem.edu

**and**

**Rev. Anna Erickson, M.Div.**

**Associate Pastor, Pillar Church**

anna@pillarchurch.com

**Abstract:** *J. B. Torrance's Trinitarian vision of worship provides a transformative framework for understanding discipleship. This article introduces two leading models of discipleship within 20th century movements: a model shaped by an understanding of the "Great Commission" that focuses on disciple-making in terms of multiplication, alongside a model driven by spiritual practices that focuses on character formation. Both models can be applied in ways that miss the trinitarian shape of life with God in Christ. Constructively engaging J. B. Torrance's understanding of worship as a trinitarian ordinance of grace lays the groundwork for a vision of discipleship shaped by Christ himself as the true disciple, rather than our own efforts and strivings.*

Kristen Deede Johnson and Anna Erickson, "Christ, the Truest Disciple: J. B. Torrance's Vision of Worship Applied Towards a Grace-Filled, Trinitarian Understanding of Discipleship," *Participatio* 10: "The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience" (2022): 153-176. *Participatio* is distributed by the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

## Introduction

In *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, J. B. Torrance explores the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity for Christian worship.<sup>1</sup> As he unpacks worship as our participation through the Holy Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father, he reframes worship as a gift in which we participate rather than as a work that we do. This gracious vision of worship has implications that extend well beyond worship to the life of discipleship more generally.

Reflecting on how people typically understand worship, Torrance writes, "[P]robably the most common and widespread view is that worship is something which we, religious people, do... No doubt we need God's grace to help us do it. We do it because Jesus taught us to do it and left us an example of how to do it. But worship is what we do before God."<sup>2</sup> This language could be applied to many contemporary views of discipleship as well. Common approaches to discipleship focus on what Christians do to live the Christian life. These approaches may include a sense that God's grace is needed to help us live as disciples, but they often place a primary emphasis on what we do before God. If Jesus has an ongoing role to play, it is as that of example.

In this article, we will explore what it might look like to reimagine discipleship as God's work, always initiated and carried through by the Spirit via our union with Christ. As we engage with contemporary models of discipleship, we will see that they often fall short both theologically and practically. Applying Torrance's reframing of worship to the way we approach discipleship, we will find theological resources that enlarge our understanding of the Trinity's role within our Christian lives and offer a more consistently gracious notion of discipleship.

## Models of Discipleship

In *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, Torrance unpacks his trinitarian view of worship in part by identifying and analyzing different theological

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<sup>1</sup> J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

models of worship. In his analysis, he highlights ways in which these models of worship are unitarian rather than trinitarian in nature. In contrasting unitarian and trinitarian, Torrance is not drawing on technical definitions of Unitarianism but rather identifying a way of approaching faith that focuses on the human dimension at the expense of the trinitarian dimension. In a unitarian view of worship, the focus is on worship as what we humans do before God. Our activity in going to church, singing, praying, and listening to the sermon is the focus. Torrance's concern is that this misses some crucial components of a biblical understanding of worship. Worship that focuses on "what we do before God," he writes, "is in practice unitarian, has no doctrine of the mediator or sole priesthood of Christ, is human-centered, has no proper doctrine of the Holy Spirit, is too often non-sacramental, and can engender weariness."<sup>3</sup> Torrance then explores different theological models that are either explicitly unitarian or practically unitarian, before articulating in more detail his understanding of a trinitarian model.

In our research on discipleship, we are in the beginning stages of mapping out differing contemporary models of discipleship. In this section we will introduce two models of discipleship that are particularly prominent today. Both models can have unitarian tendencies, in the Torrance sense of a tendency to focus on what we do in discipleship. We will offer a brief history of these two models to provide some context for understanding the landscape of contemporary discipleship.<sup>4</sup> In the next section we will engage in some theological analysis, exploring ways in which contemporary exemplars of these models are more unitarian than trinitarian. We will then offer a vision of discipleship that is trinitarian in nature, drawing on Torrance's theological framework.

One contemporary model of discipleship understands discipleship as disciple-making. Disciple-making is rooted in the belief that God's call upon us to be disciples is deeply connected with the call issued in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) to go and make disciples. As a disciple, one is called to invest in others, following the example of Jesus who in his earthly ministry invested in twelve

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The history of these concepts of discipleship has not yet been told. What is offered here is a preliminary account.

disciples, and more specifically in three (Peter, James, and John), to give us an example to follow once he died and rose again. When Jesus tells us to make disciples in the Great Commission, he intended for us to look to his example as a model. Disciple-making can be understood as a multiplication model of discipleship with an emphasis on evangelism (drawing people into the faith) and mentoring (building them up in the faith until they are ready to be sent out to evangelize and mentor others in the faith). On this model the heart of discipleship is being a disciple who makes disciples who make disciples.

The understanding of discipleship as disciple-making appears to have first been articulated and embodied in parachurch ministries in the United States in the twentieth century. Within a context in the early to mid-twentieth century in which personal evangelism and evangelistic rallies were deeply emphasized within certain strands of American Christianity, few people knew what to offer Christians as a vision for discipleship after conversion. Singularly influential in offering a vision for discipleship was Dawson Trotman, the founder of Navigators. Prominent figures like Billy Graham, Bill Bright, and Richard Halverson, as well as missionaries out in the field all over the world, drew on the vision Trotman offered.

A convert to Christianity, Trotman was passionate about personal evangelism, and eventually came to see the significance of doing “follow-up” to help converts become disciples. Two Timothy 2:2 was a shaping verse for Trotman: “and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well” (NRSVUE). Drawing on biblical examples like Paul and Timothy and Elijah and Elisha, Trotman believed that ideal follow-up was one-on-one, as a Christian invested in a new convert with the goal of building the younger believer up in the faith until the point that he or she was ready to disciple another.<sup>5</sup>

Trotman also drew on the creation story to cast his vision for one-on-one follow-up. In a message he delivered, later transcribed and published as *Born to Reproduce*, he shared,

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<sup>5</sup> See Betty Lee Skinner, *Daws: The Story of Dawson Trotman Founder of the Navigators* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).



The first order ever given to man was that he “be fruitful and multiply.” In other words, he was to reproduce after his own kind. God did not tell Adam and Eve, our first parents, to be spiritual. They were already in His image. Sin had not yet come in. He just said, “Multiply. I want more just like you, more in my own image.”<sup>6</sup>

Then Trotman made the move from physical multiplication to spiritual multiplication, writing, “In the physical realm when your children have children, you become a grandparent. Your parents are then great-grandparents, and theirs are great-great-grandparents. And so it should be in the spiritual.” Trotman believed that all Christians were called to be engaged in this spiritual multiplication. “It is God’s plan that these new babes in Christ grow,” according to Trotman. “All provision is made for their growth into maturity, and then they are to multiply — not only the rich or the educated, but all alike. Every person who is born into God’s family is to multiply.”<sup>7</sup>

The Great Commission was a significant motivating factor for Trotman. He believed that the Great Commission could be fulfilled within the generation if the spiritual multiplication approach to follow-up was adopted. He understood it as a missing link in world missions as well as domestic ministry.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, he even did the math to show that if you began with just one person investing in another person for six months, at the end of fifteen and a half years the entire population of people over three years of age could have been reached by this method of spiritual reproduction. While Trotman did not himself use the term disciple-maker, the term appears to have been directly inspired by his vision of spiritual multiplication, being introduced in the late 1950s by Lorne Sanny, who became president of Navigators after Trotman’s untimely death.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dawson Trotman, *Born to Reproduce: A Passionate Call to Maturity, Spiritual Reproduction and Spiritual Parenting to Help Fulfill The Great Commission*, A Navigator Seminar, prepared by Jim Downing, 5. Accessed at <https://www.nobts.edu/discipleship/downloadable-documents1/spiritual-formation-folder/Born%20to%20reproduce%20Dawson%20Trotman.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>8</sup> See Skinner, *Daws*, 294, 303.

<sup>9</sup> See Trotman, *Born to Reproduce*, 5, n. 1.

Also motivated by the Great Commission, Robert Coleman's *Master Plan of Evangelism* offers a complementary vision of disciple-making to that articulated by Trotman. Coleman's book was widely read when it was published in 1963 and continues to be influential today. The book emerged from Coleman's experience teaching evangelism at Asbury Seminary, a subject which he had not previously studied. To prepare for the course, he decided to study the four gospels directly to look at Jesus' own method of evangelism. He took notes on what he observed, teaching the class out of those notes, and eventually turning those notes into *Master Plan of Evangelism*. According to one recent source, *Master Plan* "is arguably the most influential book on discipleship to date."<sup>10</sup>

The approach taken in *Master Plan* is premised on looking at Jesus' example of evangelism and discipleship. As Coleman writes,

I realized I couldn't go wrong if I looked at Jesus. He is the only perfect person who has ever lived. His life on earth was flawless. His teachings are brilliant. His methods are masterful... As I dove deeper into the Gospels, I began to see patterns and principles emerge. Jesus lived with remarkable intentionality to fulfill His mission. This journey through the Gospels was a game changer. I simply wrote down His master plan as it emerged from a study of the Gospels.<sup>11</sup>

From his study of Jesus' life, Coleman identifies methods, principles, and a strategy of evangelism that he offers as a model to be followed. Recognizing that his approach does not have a lot of precedent within the tradition, he describes it as "the new evangelism we need."<sup>12</sup> In this new evangelism, discipleship becomes inextricably connected to evangelism.

This is in large part because of the centrality of the Great Commission to Coleman. Coleman understands the Great Commission as Jesus' command to all

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<sup>10</sup> "Introduction," Robert Coleman and Bobby Harrington with Josh Patrick, *Revisiting the Master Plan of Evangelism: Why Jesus' Discipleship Method is Still the Best Today* (n.p.: Exponential Resources, 2014), 9. Further, it "has sold more than 3.5 million copies and has been translated into more than 100 languages" (ibid.).

<sup>11</sup> "Beginnings," Coleman and Harrington, *Revisiting the Master Plan*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Coleman, *Master Plan of Evangelism*, 113.

Christians today to replicate the model that He followed during His earthly ministry. "Jesus told the disciples to go and make disciples. That's what He had been doing Himself... The disciples could see what He meant because they had followed Him, and He was showing them the meaning of the Great Commission in His way of life."<sup>13</sup> When by grace we come to know Jesus, "we are invited to join him in his plan to heal and redeem the world. And that plan is in essence the Great Commission — to make disciples who make disciples."<sup>14</sup> In other words, once we come into saving knowledge of Christ, we are then invited to shape our lives around the Great Commission. We become a disciple in order to make other disciples. That is God's plan to heal and redeem the world.

Evangelism is at the center of the Christian life of discipleship, according to Coleman's vision. As he writes, "Evangelism is not an optional accessory to our life. It is the heartbeat of all that we are called to be and do. It is the commission of the church which gives meaning to all else that is undertaken in the Name of Christ."<sup>15</sup> More specifically, he believes that all Christians are to undertake evangelism according to the method that he uncovered in the life of Jesus. "Here finally is where we must all evaluate the contribution that our life and witness is making to the supreme purpose of Him who is the Saviour of the world," Coleman writes. "Are those who have followed us to Christ now leading others to Him and teaching them to make disciples like ourselves?"<sup>16</sup> In short, disciple-making is the measure by which the contributions of our lives are to be judged.

Coleman believes that this method of evangelism was Jesus' intended plan to fulfill the Great Commission, and that he has no other plan in place. In a chapter on reproduction, he writes,

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<sup>13</sup> "Beginnings," Coleman and Harrington, *Revisiting the Master Plan*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Coleman, *Master Plan*, 92. In terms of living the Christian life, Coleman suggests we follow the example of Jesus as He prayed and used Scripture, and above all "what was most important in view of His ultimate purpose was that all the while He was teaching them how to win souls. Practically everything that Jesus said and did had some relevance to their work of evangelism" (77).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 109.

It all comes back to His disciples. His whole evangelistic strategy — indeed, the fulfillment of His very purpose in coming into the world, dying on the cross, and rising from the grave — depended upon the faithfulness of His chosen disciples to do this task. It did not matter how small the group was to start with so long as they reproduced and taught their disciples to reproduce.... As simple as it may seem, this was the way the Gospel would conquer. He had no other plan.<sup>17</sup>

All of this culminates in the closing line of the book: “the destiny of the multitudes hangs in the balance.”<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the book, one sees a great deal of weight placed on disciples and what they do. Coleman emphasizes their dedication, their willingness to follow, their loyalty, and their obedience. Ultimately, Coleman’s vision of discipleship depends upon the faithfulness of the disciples: “What really counts in the ultimate perpetuation of our work is the faithfulness with which our converts go out and make leaders out of their converts.”<sup>19</sup>

It’s worth noting that although this book was written in 1963, Coleman still affirms its principles. Writing in *The Master Plan of Discipleship* more than two decades later, Coleman found support for his interpretation of Jesus’ strategy of evangelism as he studied the book of Acts, arguing that the earliest Christians followed the example of Jesus as they carried out the principles of discipling that he embodied and passed on to them.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting in 2014, Coleman shared, “I believe them more today than ever before! I’ve lived long enough to see the extended

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 105-106. See also 27, 64, 102.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 110. Note he’s contrasting this with making just followers, rather than multiplying leaders.

<sup>20</sup> See Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1998). Focusing especially on the book of Acts, in this work Coleman finds evidence that the disciples made disciples who in turned disciplined others, leading to the multiplication of believers throughout the region.

impact in the lives of men and women... Yes, I believe in them more than I did in the beginning."<sup>21</sup>

Those who helped put forward this understanding of discipleship as disciple-making seem to have understood that they were articulating something new. They viewed it as a retrieval of a biblical vision that had been lost in the intervening years, but acknowledged that they were putting forward an idea that hadn't been active in the church within recent memory. To put it in terms of the title of a 1978 book written by Navigator LeRoy Eims (with a foreword by Robert Coleman), they were retrieving "the lost art of disciple making."<sup>22</sup>

And yet for many, this idea of discipleship as disciple-making has become *the* way to understand what it means to be and form disciples. In the final paragraph of the biography of Dawson Trotman, written in 1974, his biographer writes that Trotman offered two main contributions, follow-up and multiplication. She remarks, "the concept of follow-up has been widely accepted; that of disciple multiplication has not."<sup>23</sup> Today, we see that the idea of discipleship as multiplication has spread far and wide, from parachurch ministries like Navigators, Cru, Young Life, and YWAM to churches and networks of churches through writings by Bill Hull, Francis Chan (and his curriculum *Multiply*), Mike Breen (and *3DM*), Jim Putnam, Bobby Harrington, Dave Ferguson, Jeff VanderStelt, J. R. Woodward, Dan White, Jr., and Todd Wilson. Networks and online resources like Exponential, National Disciple Making Forum, Saturate, Replicate Ministries, New Thing Network, V3, Soma, and IF seem to be some of the contemporary embodiments and disseminators of this vision.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Concluding Words," Coleman and Harrington, *Revisiting the Master Plan of Evangelism*, 36.

<sup>22</sup> LeRoy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> Skinner, *Daws*, 389.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004); Francis Chan, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012); Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); [www.exponential.org](http://www.exponential.org); [www.discipleship.org](http://www.discipleship.org); [www.thev3movement.org](http://www.thev3movement.org); and [ifgathering.com](http://ifgathering.com).

The first model of discipleship we have been exploring understands discipleship as disciple-making, while a second model emphasizes discipleship as spiritual formation and transformation. If the first one emphasizes the “go and make disciples” portion of the Great Commission, this second model could be associated with the “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” section. The vision underlying this model is that of disciples being formed into the character of Christ through spiritual disciplines and practices. To grow as disciples in this model’s understanding, disciples need to invest in spiritual practices that shape and transform them. Names like Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and Ruth Haley Barton would be associated with this approach to discipleship.<sup>25</sup> The Good and Beautiful Series, used by many churches and written by James Bryan Smith, who himself was mentored by Foster and Willard, is significant here as well.<sup>26</sup> While it has some differences, we could also include the “practices” emphasis articulated by people like Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra here.<sup>27</sup> This model of discipleship is rooted in the conviction that spiritual practices can form and transform disciples to become more like Jesus Christ and to live the way of life God intended in this world.

Because the first model of discipleship, discipleship as disciple-making, is predominant within certain segments of contemporary Christianity, it serves as the main focus of our account here. Interestingly, though, at least one strand of this second model of discipleship developed as something of a response to the model of

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Richard J. Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Richard J. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981); Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988); Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998); Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006); Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transformative Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004); and Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> See James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> See Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996) and Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999).

discipleship as disciple-making. Dallas Willard's writings are motivated by his sense that evangelicalism lacked a biblically and theologically robust vision and practice of discipleship. He recognizes that Navigators was the group most closely associated with discipleship and, while acknowledging the faith and influence of Dawson Trotman and the Navigators more widely, he believes that their model of discipleship was problematic. Willard is particularly concerned about the ways they separated the act of conversion from discipleship, so that one first became a Christian and then later, after receiving more follow-up training, became a disciple. He is also concerned that in this model discipleship is primarily associated with reproduction and disciple-making, so that to be a disciple is to be one who has been trained to convert others.<sup>28</sup>

Willard worries that the emphases of this model do not give sufficient attention to the transformation of disciples into Christlikeness, nor to living as disciples in light of the Kingdom of God here and now. The vision of discipleship he offers is an attempt to correct these shortcomings. With a similar methodology as Coleman, Willard looks to Jesus to find a model for discipleship. As he explores Jesus' relationship with his disciples, he uncovers a method which he describes as, "to gather a group of people by telling the story of Jesus, featuring his resurrection and pending return, to show by example what it meant to live with him now, already beyond death, and to lead others into such a life of being 'with Jesus, learning to be like him.'"<sup>29</sup> This idea of "being with Jesus, learning to be like him," is central to Willard's vision of discipleship, in which transformation occurs largely through imitation and following Jesus' example. This includes imitating his spiritual practices. As Willard writes, "The pervasive practices of our Lord form the core of those very activities that through the centuries have stood as disciplines for the spiritual life. It would seem only logical to emulate his daily actions since he was a great master of the spiritual life."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Dallas Willard, "Discipleship," *Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, edited by Gerald McDermott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 236-246 and Willard, *The Great Omission*, 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> Willard, "Discipleship," 243.

<sup>30</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 29.

## Contemporary Exemplars: Unitarian Discipleship

With this recent history of models of discipleship in mind, let us turn to look at a contemporary exemplar of each model. In a spirit of appreciation, we'll examine representative resources: *Discipleshift* by Jim Putnam and Bobby Harrington, which exemplifies a contemporary version of the disciple-making approach, and *The Great Omission*, which represents Dallas Willard's contributions to the stream of discipleship that is marked by transformation through spiritual disciplines and practices.

*Discipleshift* is written as a critique of "conversion-only" evangelism, in favor of a deeper, relational model. In the foreword to this book, Robert Coleman, author of *Master Plan*, acknowledges that much of the church growth we see today includes an "aimlessness and lack of spiritual depth."<sup>31</sup> Coleman sees Putnam and Harrington's approach as a compatible next step to his work in *Master Plan*, especially in the ways that they too look to Jesus' life and ministry as the pinnacle example of a relational methodology of discipleship, one that we are supposed to imitate. While this is true, the model that Putnam and Harrington present carries forward many of the shortcomings that can be found in Coleman's work, missing the fullness of God's initiative and overemphasizing methods and strategies that rely solely on our own efforts, separate from our identity as those who are found in Christ and participate in the Spirit's work.

At the opening of their project, Putnam and Harrington offer the following litmus test of effective disciples: "whether the people who are getting saved are being conformed to the likeness of Christ."<sup>32</sup> Then, they ask this question: "Are we making mature disciples of Jesus who are not only able to withstand the culture but are also making disciples of Jesus themselves?"<sup>33</sup> Our efforts, strivings, and strategies take center stage in their framework of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, especially in their emphasis on multiplication and "effective transformation."

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<sup>31</sup> Jim Putnam and Bobby Harrington, *Discipleshift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

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



In the opening section about who a disciple is, Putnam and Harrington operate under the assumption that the whole process of growing disciples is up to us. Their definition of a disciple of Jesus places *some* emphasis on God's act that might create potential room for discipleship as an "ordinance of grace" ("A true disciple of Jesus is a person who follows Jesus, is transformed by Jesus, and joins with Jesus on his mission"<sup>34</sup>), but the way that they implement this definition throughout the rest of their project strays from the idea of joining with Jesus. It is in practice unitarian, in the sense of being entirely dependent on human strategies and implementation.

For example, "How to Start Growing People" is the title of chapter three, where Putnam and Harrington outline a process for leading people through five stages of spiritual growth. For them, "if a person is saved, that person was saved for a purpose — the born again are given a new DNA that, when developed and becomes fully grown, will result in a mature disciple who makes disciples. It's every Christian's destination and destiny."<sup>35</sup> This kind of "arrival" that depends on certain benchmarks of Christian maturity does find its grounding in a New Testament vision of flourishing life in Christ (Colossians 1:28). However, Putnam and Harrington's discipleship model excludes the idea of being made complete in Christ in one's baptismal reality of union with Christ, instead defining one's discipleship identity in terms of output.

While Putnam and Harrington do acknowledge Jesus Christ's role as one who transforms us ("he transforms how we see the world, and what we value and consider important"<sup>36</sup>), in their framework, Christ's transforming work in us is always serving the broader goal of our discipleship-production. In their view, any character transformation and shaping of how we see the world is to serve the purpose of making more and more disciples, rather than Christlikeness being a telos and eschatological reality in itself. They do not use identity categories of being "in Christ," instead using language of character development. While Christians are

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 49.

called to always be open to the Spirit's long work of shaping and growing us, Putnam and Harrington present an "up and to the right" picture of discipleship marked by productivity and control that does not seem to hold space for true suffering, seasons of questions, or a deeply-rooted identity found in the person of Christ himself in our moments of weakness and frailty. Overall, Putnam and Harrington's project of shifting an approach to discipleship depends on a unitarian theological framework that prioritizes our efforts and progress for fulfilling the church's mission in the world, rather than acknowledging discipleship as something God does in and through us, even as we are already joined to Jesus and made participants in God's Triune life.

In a slightly different way, Dallas Willard's approach to discipleship, which primarily emphasizes spiritual disciplines and practices as the pathway to growing as a Christian, presents an alternative set of contemporary assumptions and resources available to practitioners. Willard's vision, while offering a slower, more contemplative alternative to the high-powered programmatic vision of Putnam and Harrington, is still largely unitarian in its emphasis on what disciples do for transformation. It falls short of a robust trinitarian vision of discipleship in similar ways to *Discipleshift* and *Master Plan*, missing the trinitarian reality that Torrance so beautifully brings to the fore: that we are joined to Jesus by the Spirit and given full access to God through Christ's work, made participants in the Triune life, fully adopted and cherished.

For Willard, making disciples looks like this: "The Great Commission is fulfilled as the regenerate soul makes its highest intent to live in the commandments of Christ and accordingly makes realistic plans to realize this intent by an adequate course of spiritual disciplines."<sup>37</sup> High intentions and realistic plans, rather than the initiative of God in Christ, are emphasized within Willard's vision. And how does spiritual growth happen for Willard? It seems to be equal parts our effort and God's effort, some sort of collaborative reality in which our efforts might make or break success: "What brings about our transformation into Christ-likeness is our direct, personal interaction with Christ through the Spirit. The Spirit makes

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<sup>37</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission*, 7.

Christ present to us and draws us toward his likeness."<sup>38</sup> Willard makes this work of the Spirit dependent on our capacities to open ourselves to the Spirit, and we reach maturity "because we have learned to let the Spirit foster his life in us."<sup>39</sup>

Willard states this reality differently in his section on the keys to the kingdom, in which he explains that spiritual practices are a pathway toward claiming the reality of the abundance of God in our lives:

The abundance of God to our lives, our families, and our ministries is not passively received or imposed and does not happen to us by chance. It is claimed and put into action by our active, intelligent pursuit of it. We must seek out ways to live and act in union with the flow of God's Kingdom life that should come through our relationship with Jesus.<sup>40</sup>

Willard's project is marked by our initiative and pursuit in a way that seems more unitarian than the vision of worship, and constructively, discipleship, that Torrance presents. What would it look like to maintain and reframe the best parts of Willard's and Putnam and Harrington's projects within a more expansive vision of discipleship that is marked by adoption, participation, and union rather than practices, performance, and striving? Could Torrance offer a way forward for embracing a vision of discipleship that is generously Reformed in its emphasis on God's initiative, while also generating robust space for participation in mission, worship, community, and spiritual practices, all in response to God's love?

### **Discipleship as an "Ordinance of Grace": Identity and the Ongoing Priesthood of Christ, the "One True Disciple"**

In J. B. Torrance's *Worship, Community and Triune God of Grace*, he insists that all our worship must be seen as an ordinance of grace.<sup>41</sup> For Torrance, worship is an

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>41</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 59-61.

utter gift from God to us, in which Christ the one true priest is “the one true worshipper.”<sup>42</sup> Mirroring this language, how might a vision of discipleship, which includes and is informed by worship, flow from an understanding of Jesus as the “one true disciple?” And how could this vision incorporate the best impulses of the multiplication method (more people knowing Jesus) and spiritual practices method (experiencing God’s transforming presence), while holding those realities within a theologically grounded framework of identity in Christ and Christ’s ongoing work of incorporating us into God’s life by the Spirit? Torrance’s emphasis on calling as an outflow of our God-given identity, as well as his unique emphasis on Christ’s ongoing priesthood, can lay the groundwork for a discipleship-imagination shaped by Christ himself as the true disciple, not our own efforts and strivings.

“There is no more urgent need in our churches today than to recover the trinitarian nature of grace,” Torrance writes, “that it is by grace alone, through the gift of Jesus Christ in the Spirit that we can enter into and live a life of communion with God our Father.”<sup>43</sup> When we lose sight of the Trinity, according to Torrance, we miss the extent of the grace offered to us by God. It is not simply that we are offered salvation in and through Jesus Christ and then set on a path to live for Jesus, but that through Jesus Christ we are drawn by the Holy Spirit into the very communion that Jesus shares with his Father. To know Jesus Christ is to be drawn by the Holy Spirit into that shared intimate communion.

For Torrance, this language of communion is central as we consider the nature of worship, with implications for the Christian life more widely. A trinitarian understanding of worship, as Torrance articulates it, views worship as the gift of participating in the Son’s communion with the Father through the Holy Spirit. This places the relationship between the Son and the Father at the center of worship, and indeed at the center of the New Testament, according to Torrance. That is to say, at the center of our worship is not our experience of worship, nor our activity of worship, but the triune God. Similarly, at the center of our faith is not our experience of conversion nor our activity of discipleship, but the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Putting this in terms of the Great Commission, we could say

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 59.

that discipleship involves being baptized and incorporated into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, we are drawn into the communion that the Son and the Father share, so that we have union with God at all times and in all places, both in times of formal worship and in our daily lives offered to God (Romans 12:1).

As we are drawn by the Spirit into the communion shared between the Father and the Son, we are simultaneously invited to participate in a life of mission and service. By the Spirit, Christ draws us "to participate both in his life of worship and communion with the Father and in his mission from the Father to the world."<sup>44</sup> This life of mission and service is realized in and through the church, as we are connected through the Spirit to the body of Christ. As we are invited by the Spirit to participate in the triune God, we are in fact invited into a "twofold relationship... a relationship between God and humanity realized vicariously for us in Christ... and at the same time a relationship between Christ and the church."<sup>45</sup> That is to say, to be invited into the communion shared between Father and Son by the Spirit is simultaneously to be invited into the communion shared between other members of the family of God by the Spirit. Our adoption as children of God connects us to the wider family of God, and to live as God's children is to receive and participate in God's mission in the world. This mission continues to be God's mission, so that God remains at the center even as we are invited to participate with God in a life of mission and service.

Central to Torrance's trinitarian understanding of worship is a belief that our identity is found in communion with God and others. He calls us to understand the human person not primarily as an individual but as one created to be in relationship. As Torrance writes, "[God's] primary purpose for humanity is filial... we have been created by God to find our true being-in-communion, in sonship, in the mutual personal relationships of love."<sup>46</sup> When the Spirit draws us into the communion shared between the Father and the Son, we find our identity as children

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 31; see also 30.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 38.

of God. To be a disciple, then, is to find our full and true selves in communion with God and one another by Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is to find our identity as children of God, as the Spirit enables us to know God as "Abba! Father" (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). Here, Torrance provides a theological bridge between the discipleship language of the gospels and the adoption language of Paul's epistles, reminding us that our calling in Christ is an outflow of our identity as members of the family of God.

For Torrance, our identity in Christ comes first and this, in turn, shapes our calling as we participate in the triune God's mission in the world. Torrance articulates a link between being children of God and seeking God's kingdom. As by the Spirit we participate in the communion shared between the Father and the Son, so by the Spirit we participate in the kingdom of our triune God. This is because Jesus Christ came to save humanity from their sins and also "to bring to fulfillment the trinitarian purposes of God in creation."<sup>47</sup> To enter into union with Christ by the Spirit is to enter into the larger biblical story in which the saving work of Christ brings to fulfillment God's purposes in creation. To find our being in communion with God and one another is to participate in God's mission to the wider created and redeemed world. For Torrance, in short, to enter into "sonship" by the Spirit is to simultaneously enter into communion with God in the kingdom of God.<sup>48</sup>

As we are united to Christ, living as God's children and seeking God's kingdom, we have the gift of relying not only on the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit but also on the ongoing priesthood of Jesus Christ. This is an important biblical concept to Torrance, who draws on passages in Hebrews to remind us that in Christ we have a priest who continues to live to intercede for us. As the high priest of the old covenant represented God to the people of Israel as well as the people of Israel to God, so as our great high priest Jesus Christ represents God to humanity and humanity to God. Through Jesus' vicarious humanity, he was able to live his life, suffer, die on the cross, rise again, and ascend on behalf of all humanity. He lived a life of perfect communion with the Father by the Spirit, which culminated in his self-offering on our behalf, and then through His resurrection and ascension Jesus'

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>48</sup> See *ibid.*

ministry continues on our behalf. Jesus, as Torrance puts it, has a twofold ministry: the once and for all ministry composed of his earthly life and sacrificial death *and* his ongoing ministry of worship and intercession.<sup>49</sup>

Through Jesus' ongoing priesthood, we are able to rely on the grace of God not only for our salvation but for our ongoing lives as disciples. Jesus continues to live in communion with the Father on our behalf, to offer worship in our place, to pray for us, and to engage in God's mission in the world. By the Spirit, we are invited to participate in this communion, in the worship of Christ, in the ongoing intercessions of Christ, and in God's mission and kingdom in the world. In this trinitarian vision, we are never left on our own as disciples, but always depend upon the ongoing priesthood of Christ and the active role of the Holy Spirit. Our faith is a response to God's grace and a participation in God's ongoing ministry. As Torrance writes, "In our human, frail, broken, unworthy response, the Spirit helps us in our infirmities, lifting us up to Christ who, in his ascended humanity, is our God-given response, the leader of our worship, the pioneer of our faith, our advocate and high priest, who through the eternal Spirit presents us with himself to the Father."<sup>50</sup>

For Torrance, the ongoing priesthood of Jesus Christ is also essential for defining our participation in worship as a response to God, rather than something we initiate ourselves. It is because Jesus brings us before the Father as our representative and brother that we are able to worship God at all: "He presents us in himself to the Father as God's dear children, and our righteousness is hid with Christ in God."<sup>51</sup> God sees us as righteous and pure, worthy to worship him and worthy to be called his children. And all of that is possible because God has acted first, in Christ, to be in relationship with us and offer us his own self; Torrance points toward this reality of God's initiation when he describes worship as an "ordinance of grace." What might it mean to apply this reality of Christ's ongoing advocacy for us to an understanding of discipleship? Could discipleship too be an

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<sup>49</sup> See *ibid.*, 83.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

ordinance of grace? If Christ as our Great High Priest is the “one true worshipper” in Torrance’s framework, could Christ also be “the one true disciple” on our behalf?

Putnam and Harrington suggest that a true disciple is “a person who follows Jesus, is transformed by Jesus, and joins with Jesus on his mission.”<sup>52</sup> Given this definition, we argue that because Christ is the one who walked steadfastly with the Father on our behalf during his life on earth, and still now in his ongoing vicarious humanity, Christ himself is the truest disciple. What could this mean for our understanding of a life of discipleship? Because our union with Christ by the Spirit enables our communion with God, we are no longer pressured to achieve increased closeness with God in a way that can be measured or controlled. Christ’s closeness with God, as the one true disciple for our sake, empowers and elicits our own closeness with God as an utter gift, because we are in Christ.

Just as Christ the High Priest as the one true worshiper presents us to the Father as God’s dear children, Christ the one true disciple, as one who has lived perfectly in fellowship with the Father in his human life, extends that same fellowship to us. Our growth in Christian love and faithfulness, then, is always a response to Christ’s own fellowship with God. Torrance puts it this way:

[T]he human-Godward movement, in which we are given to participate (as in worship and communion), is given freely and unconditionally. Our response in faith and obedience is a response to the response already made for us by Christ to the Father’s holy love, a response we are summoned to make in union with Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Any faith and obedience that the Spirit carries through in us is made possible by and remains inextricable from the reality of Christ’s own obedience to and relationship with the Father. Christ speaks of the Spirit’s work in this process in this way: “All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:15).

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<sup>52</sup> Putnam and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 54.

<sup>53</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 54.



We want to make sure to include an important trinitarian clarification. In describing Christ as the one true disciple in the spirit of Torrance, we are not meaning to carry subordination into the eternal triune life. Just as Torrance emphasizes that it is the ongoing vicarious humanity of Christ, post-incarnation, through which he is the one true worshiper on our behalf, it is this same ongoing vicarious humanity through which Christ is the most faithful, true, obedient disciple on our behalf, for us and for our salvation. In his book *Theology as Discipleship*, Keith Johnson describes sharing in Jesus' life of self-giving discipleship this way:

We have been united to Christ, and he lives his own eternal life together with us. And the fact that he lowered himself to the floor to wash feet while reflecting on the reality that he was about to return to his Father in heaven tells us precisely how Jesus intends to live his eternal life: he is going to spend it giving himself to us in love so that we can live more faithfully with him. This is what he is doing even now at the Father's right hand.<sup>54</sup>

Christ, the one true disciple, is not just our example of faithfulness and obedience; rather, his ongoing self-giving is the truest discipleship in which we participate by the Spirit. Just as our worshiping life is not our own, by nature of our union with him, our life of discipleship is not our own. Our discipleship is Christ's, because Christ has made it his own.

What would it look like to bear witness to, or participate in, practically, the kind of discipleship that we are describing, a discipleship that is truly an ordinance of grace? A discipleship that is shaped by theological categories and emphases like identity, adoption, union with Christ, and Christ's ongoing priesthood on our behalf that Torrance offers?

Imagine these ideas taking shape within a small group ministry, or perhaps a weekly shared meal in a church basement: Oftentimes, in the beginning stages of group formation and life together, folks in small group ministries share their stories of faith with one another as a pathway toward getting to know each other. A

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<sup>54</sup> Keith L. Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 148.

truncated framework of discipleship that draws from Coleman's multiplication method might lead to a certain way of sharing stories. Perhaps people would narrate their stories of life with God with attention to who led them to Christ and the people they had led to Christ, evaluating their spiritual maturity in terms of producing effective disciples. An alternatively truncated framework of discipleship that narrowly emphasizes spiritual disciplines and practices might lead to a different way of sharing stories. Perhaps these people would narrate their stories of life with God in terms of growth in prayer, longer periods of time reading scripture, perhaps sharing insights from their quiet time with God.

A more expansive vision of discipleship, in concert with the Torrance's contributions, could lead a congregation to a different way of telling their stories of life with God. While mentors, practices, and significant encounters with God's word would still be mentioned as participants in the story, the main actor would be God: God as the one who initiates, enables, and carries through our lives of discipleship, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This kind of story-telling would be theocentric with retrospective reflection on the Spirit's work all along: "God drew me, God led me, God joined me to this body of believers." It would also emphasize the disciples' reliance on the ongoing intercession of Christ, rather than on their own lives of prayer.

As disciples seek to fulfill the Great Commission, they would recognize that it's not up to them to make disciples, but it is part of their calling as members of the family of God to invite others to recognize their adoption into God's family and their identity as beloved children of God. Receiving this identity and living as God's children means actively participating by the Spirit in the ongoing mission of God in the world. These disciples would ask questions like, "Where is Jesus Christ making all things new around us?" and "How can we participate by the Spirit in the ongoing mission and service of Jesus?"

Disciples following this trinitarian vision would focus first on *who* questions before moving to *how* questions. As Torrance writes, "It is only as we know *who* God is and *what* he has done and is doing that we can find appropriate answers to the question of *how*, and then see the incredible relevance of the gospel to every

area of life.”<sup>55</sup> “Who is the triune God?” This is the question with which these disciples begin. And then, “Who are we, who are invited to participate in the communion shared between the Father and the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit?” As we participate in this intimate communion, we are invited to participate in the ongoing ministry and mission of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship as an ordinance of grace can be understood as responsive in nature, a response to who God is, to a triune God of love and grace. This is discipleship understood not primarily as a response to a command (such as “go and make disciples”), but as a calling flowing from disciples’ identity as adopted children of God. In this sense, the work of the Spirit in conforming disciples to Christ is more significant than their work trying to obey a command. As Jeremy Begbie writes, “We are thus at our most obedient, not when we conform to some law imposed from without, but when we are conformed through the Spirit to the likeness of Christ our brother.”<sup>56</sup>

To consider discipleship as a calling that flows from our God-given identity and to remember that as disciples we are utterly reliant on the ongoing work of Christ and the Spirit both in our lives and in the world shifts the emphasis of discipleship from our efforts and striving. It keeps the triune God at the center, rather than what we do as disciples. It offers a vision of the Christian life in which both salvation and ongoing discipleship happen entirely by the grace of God. As Torrance writes:

It seems to me that in a pastoral situation our first task is not to throw people back on themselves with exhortations and instructions as to what to do and how to do it, but to direct people to the gospel of grace — to Jesus Christ, that they might look to him to lead them, open their hearts in faith and in prayer, and draw them by the Spirit into his

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<sup>55</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 70-71.

<sup>56</sup> Jeremy Begbie, “Creation, Christ, and Culture in Dutch Neo-Calvinism,” in *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World, Essays Presented to James Torrance*, edited by Trevor Hart and Daniel Thimell (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1989), 131.

eternal life of communion with the Father.<sup>57</sup>

Torrance's theological vision helps us uncover a vision of discipleship that points disciples to the gospel of grace rather than throwing them back on themselves. Rooted in Jesus as the one true disciple, we can be invited into a trinitarian picture of discipleship that is gracious all the way through.

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<sup>57</sup> Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 45.

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

**Geordie W. Ziegler**

**Imago Christi, Novo**

gwziegler@gmail.com

**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.





# THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CORPORATE WORSHIP IN LIGHT OF THE THEOLOGY OF T. F. AND J. B. TORRANCE

**Jeannine M. Graham**

**Associate Professor Emerita of Religious Studies, George Fox University**

jgraham@georgefox.edu

**Abstract:** *The Holy Spirit is not only absolutely integral to the triune life of God but is vital to Christian discipleship and corporate worship. Where worship has focused all too often on what Christians do in response to Christ's reconciling work, the Torrances remind us that worship does not hinge on us. Jesus' representative, substitutionary mediation for us in our place provides the foundation by which we may joyfully participate in Jesus' all-sufficient Response to and worship of the Father through union with him by the Spirit, discovering our true personhood in communion with God and with one another.*

## **Introduction**

Amidst the lamentable fallout on multiple fronts from the current pandemic has been a decided downturn in in-person corporate worship services in churches across the country. Understandably, mandated lockdowns forced churches to develop creative ways of maintaining connections with and ministering to their people. Exclusively livestreamed Sunday worship services — affectionately referred to as “pajama church” by some — became the new normal. Over the course of time with the advent of effective vaccines and seemingly less virulent COVID strains, most churches have returned to in-person services with optional mask-wearing policies while many have also continued the livestream recordings. However, by

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and large in-person church attendance has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. The reasons for this can be varied. It could be understandably attributed to health concerns and an abundance of caution on the part of some who are feeling particularly vulnerable. It might signal a shift in habits that have downplayed the very need or desirability for a physical gathering of worshippers in the same space. Some might question the rationale of going to a church building when one can listen to the sermon and enjoy the music in the comfort of one's own home and be done with it within an hour's time, circumventing the commute. Has worship been reduced in the minds of a significant number of people to tuning in to an inspiring message and a few prayers in detachment from other worshippers? Is in-person corporate worship becoming an incidental, perhaps even dispensable, luxury, the loss of which would not feel all that detrimental to Christian discipleship? Such questions, while not equating worship simply to a series of predictable activities believers perform, do raise the issue of how believers perceive the dynamics involved in coming together as a community of faith for worship.

A flurry of Scriptures come to mind which underscore the value of in-person corporate worship. Psalm 73 presents a person striving to hang onto the opening theological affirmation that "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart"<sup>1</sup> while his life observation chafes against that notion. As he witnesses unscrupulous pagans thriving and reaping life's material "goodies" though they care nothing for the things of God while those striving to be faithful seem to get the short end of the stick, he wonders where the payoff is. As the psalm unfolds, we see that incongruity bringing him to a crisis of faith whereby he is tempted to abandon his faith "*until I entered the sanctuary of God*" (v. 17, emphasis mine). The crucial pivot point for him did not come through his own individual reflection in isolation from others; rather, something about entering into the corporate context with fellow worshippers enlarged his perspective to glimpse a grander vision of God's redemptive strategy.

The writer of Hebrews cites another reason for valuing in-person corporate worship. After laying out a masterful exposition of Jesus as the true High Priest of a new covenant, whose once-for-all self-offering through his life, death and

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 73:1 (New International Version).

resurrection is the unparalleled apex of God's redeeming purpose to rescue a fallen world, the writer senses that second-generation believers are in danger of becoming slovenly and not fully aware of the redemptive riches of the Gospel that had been bequeathed to them. He earnestly wants to jostle them awake and inject them with a newfound sense of urgency so that they might rediscover afresh the unrivaled treasure and hope they have in Christ: "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching."<sup>2</sup> The writer's undertone in such an exhortation is hardly blasé. He senses there is something vital about physically gathering together as a worshipping body that makes it more than merely an optional extra for those so inclined.

Finally, after expounding on the wonders of God destroying the hostility between Jews and Gentiles and reconciling them to himself through the Cross, thus creating one new humanity in Christ, in whom we all have access to the Father through the Spirit, the Apostle Paul makes this impassioned appeal to believers: "Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus."<sup>3</sup> Once again, he doesn't send them off as individuals to contemplate the marvels of atoning grace in isolation from others. Rather he reminds them of their *corporate* identity as fellow citizens with God's people, members of God's household, those who are "being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."<sup>4</sup> As such they are to interact in real time with one another in ways that upbuild each other and glorify God.

The precise focus of this paper is to examine the role played by the Holy Spirit in the experience of corporate worship. It is axiomatic that corporate worship is a mainstay of Christian discipleship. And most, if not all, churches would accord some role to the Holy Spirit, although how and to what extent this is explicitly

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<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV).

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 5:18-20 (NIV).

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:19-22 (NIV).

expressed in worship settings can vary widely, owing to denominational commitments and traditions. Rather than fixating on the “hows” of worship, what I first want to do here is to look at some of the key foundational underpinnings laced throughout the writings of T. F. Torrance and J. B. Torrance that address the all-important *Who* question of the God we worship, which can shed vital light on *What* this God has accomplished for us in Christ. As the person and work of Christ is so integral to the person and work of the Holy Spirit, it is incumbent on us first to examine the Torrance brothers’ christological foundation before engaging with the pneumatological ramifications for corporate worship. That will provide the contours by which to understand the Spirit’s involvement in actualizing the Gospel within us in a Christ-centered, Spirit-infused expression of authentic worship. Finally, I would like to suggest a possible tool the Spirit might utilize itself within a corporate worship setting, a tool of which I find little explicit mention within the Torrancean canon yet which strikes me as within the realm of possible fidelity to it.

At the outset of his foreword to Kevin Navarro’s illuminating study on Trinitarian doxology, Thomas Noble rightly offers this telling remark: “As James B. Torrance used to insist, dogmatics arises out of doxology.”<sup>5</sup> Navarro follows this up with the following corollary: “Liturgy exposes theology. But it is also true that liturgy shapes and forms theology.”<sup>6</sup> In a similar vein T. F. Torrance weighs in with this statement: “Belief and worship are inextricably intertwined.”<sup>7</sup> Reverence, adoration and worship shape belief, while true belief reflexively informs worship. Such an observation bears itself out constantly throughout the Torrancean lore, as will become evident.

## **Worship Grounded in the Gospel of Grace**

James Torrance contends that “how we worship God must reflect who God is — the triune God of grace — and what he has done and is doing for us in Christ and by

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Noble, “Foreword” to Kevin Navarro, *Trinitarian Doxology. T. F. and J.B. Torrance’s Theology of Worship as Participation by the Spirit in the Son’s Communion with the Father* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020), xi.

<sup>6</sup> Navarro, *Trinitarian Doxology*, xvii.

<sup>7</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 134.

the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> In J. B. Torrance’s apt words in the preface to *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* we hear the unmistakable trinitarian overtones for all that follows. Though God had so crafted the cosmos so as to resound with the grateful praise of all God’s creatures extolling the glory and magnificence of their Creator in a symphony of worship, something went awry. Human mutiny attested in Genesis 3 gave rise to an unrelenting cascade of alienation, dysfunction and bondage on a cosmic scale, prompting the Apostle Paul to liken creation to a woman groaning in labor, longing for its liberation. Rather than scrap his despoiled creation entirely, God went into search-and-rescue mode. One would be hard pressed to find a more succinct summary statement of the Gospel of grace as exemplified in the person and work of Jesus than here:

The good news is that God comes to us in Jesus to stand in for us and bring to fulfillment his purposes of worship and communion. Jesus comes to be the priest of creation to do for us, men and women, what we failed to do, to offer to the Father the worship and the praise we failed to offer, to glorify God by a life of perfect love and obedience, to be the one true servant of the Lord. In him and through him we are renewed by the Spirit in the image of God and in the worship of God in a life of shared communion. Jesus comes as our brother to be our great high priest, to carry on his loving heart the joys, the sorrows, the prayers, the conflict of all his creatures, to reconcile all things to God, and to intercede for all nations as our eternal mediator and advocate.<sup>9</sup>

The Gospel of grace is the Son of God entering the world that came into being through him clothed in the very fallen human flesh we share in order to sanctify it and bend our rebellious wills back to the Father,<sup>10</sup> undoing the disastrous legacy of the first Adam’s disobedience. He did so by recreating human nature from within as he daily lived out an unbroken life of faithful obedience, in the process

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<sup>8</sup> James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>9</sup> J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 126.

reconfiguring human existence as the new Adam.<sup>11</sup> It is vital to understand that for both Torrance brothers it is not pristine human nature untainted by the effects of the Fall that is inhabited by Jesus in the incarnation. For if it were so, grace would hover somewhere over and above us, not reaching us in the depths of our darkness. Rather, “he assumes that very humanity which is in need of redemption... that our humanity might be turned back to God in him by his sinless life in the Spirit, and, through him, in us.”<sup>12</sup> Lest it be missed, it is worth stressing that such atoning transformation happens not only *through* Christ’s work but is wrought *in and through his very person*, echoing Calvin’s stress on atonement as *en Christo*, not merely *dia Christou*.<sup>13</sup>

The Gospel of grace is Jesus not only representing God to us as the fully divine Incarnate Son but also representing us to God as the fully human covenant partner of God offering the perfect response of love and obedience on our behalf, which our addiction to sin has rendered us incapable of rendering on our own. Far from merely providing a moral exemplar who came to earth to show us how to live rightly, the incarnation demands that we look at Jesus through both lenses of a pair of binoculars, so to speak — on the one hand, seeing in him both the *Creator God* through whom all things, including our human nature, were created and therefore who alone could *re-create* that nature because he is inherently bonded to it as its Creator; on the other hand, seeing him also as the human covenant partner of God responding to the Father on our behalf as our representative. The ever-recurring

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 5:12-21.

<sup>12</sup> J. B. Torrance, “Christ In Our Place” in *A Passion for Christ. The Vision that Ignites Ministry* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1999), 47. Cf. also T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 281; T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 136; T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 48-49: “[T]he Incarnation was the coming of God to save us in the heart of our fallen and depraved humanity, where humanity is at its wickedest in its enmity and violence against the reconciling love of God... the coming of God to take upon himself our fallen nature, our actual human existence laden with sin and guilt, our humanity diseased in mind and soul in its estrangement or alienation from the Creator... the whole man had to be assumed by Christ is the whole man was to be saved.”

<sup>13</sup> J. B. Torrance (referring to John Calvin’s point in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.4), *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 50. Cf. also James B. Torrance, “Christ In Our Place” in *A Passion for Christ*, 43, 46.

expression “vicarious humanity of Christ”<sup>14</sup> reflects this dual reality<sup>15</sup> that Christ’s personhood both *includes* us as our Representative and acts *in our place* as our Substitute.<sup>16</sup> Both concepts are vital to a proper understanding of who Jesus is and what his actions have accomplished for us. Unless they are held together, the Gospel of grace forged for us in our place and on our behalf in the person of our Redeemer Lord and actualized in us by the Holy Spirit will inevitably lead to a truncated view of worship that ends up replacing Christ’s all-sufficient response at the center with our own paltry rendition.

### **Jesus’ High-Priestly Mediation**

Both Torrances place great stock on the mediation of Jesus through his High Priestly role.<sup>17</sup> There is no question but that the Old Testament High Priest operated in a vicarious role on behalf of the people on the Day of Atonement.<sup>18</sup> Just as he would act as the people’s representative before God in entering the Holy of Holies

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<sup>14</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 136. Torrance sees in the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ a fleshing out of 2 Corinthians 9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (NIV). Torrance’s rendition strikes a similar note: “He the Son of God united himself with us in our actual human condition so intimately and profoundly that through his healing and sanctifying of our human nature in himself we may be made with him sons of God.”

<sup>15</sup> J. B. Torrance, “Christ In Our Place” in *A Passion for Christ*, 43-44: “He is at once the God whom we worship and to whom we pray...and he is at the same time the One who himself for us lived a life in the power of prayer....God in love gives himself to the world in Christ as God to be the Object of our love and worship, and at the same time He comes as Man to provide for us that life of human love and obedience and worship for which we were made and so constitute himself our Saviour.”

<sup>16</sup> J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 47, 50-52, 56, 80, 78, 87-88, 92.

<sup>17</sup> J. B. Torrance, “Prayer and the Priesthood of Christ” in *A Passion for Christ*, 64-65: “We do not only begin the Christian life by committing ourselves in faith to Jesus Christ, to receive the forgiveness of our sins. We are summoned all our life to look away in faith to Christ our High Priest, to let him lift us up daily by the Spirit into his prayer life. Faith means surrendering ourselves, abandoning ourselves daily to be led by the Spirit... We can only pray aright in the Spirit who is given to us as we abandon ourselves daily to Christ who ever lives to intercede for us and with us.” Notice the prominent role played by the Spirit in rendering the priestly mediation accessible to us.

<sup>18</sup> J. B. Torrance, “The Vicarious Humanity of Christ” in T. F. Torrance, ed., *The Incarnation* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press), 1981, 137-139. Cf. also T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 45-46.

with the sacrificial blood to plead for God's forgiveness and the cleansing of the covenant bond, he would emerge as God's representative to the people assuring them of the desired restoration. Just as "all Israel entered in"<sup>19</sup> in the person of their priestly mediator, so Jesus' High Priestly role enables him to displace our paltry, woefully inadequate offerings of ourselves with the perfectly acceptable offering of himself, "the inclusive and representative humanity of Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant who represents God to humanity and humanity to God in his own Person as the One on behalf of the Many."<sup>20</sup>

T. F. Torrance speaks of Jesus' "radical substitution" including both his death and his Incarnate person and life. "Substitution understood in this radical way means that Christ takes our place in all our human life and activity before God, even in our believing, praying and worshipping of God, for he has yoked himself to us in such a profound way that he stands in for us, and upholds us at every point in our human relations before God."<sup>21</sup> It is "an atoning and reconciling exchange in which what is ours is displaced by Christ who substituted himself in our place yet is restored in a new way to us."<sup>22</sup> Torrance sees in Galatians 2:20 ample justification for construing the concept of substitution to include Jesus' substitutionary *faith* which undergirds our own faith response. The Christian life not only is believing *in* Jesus as its object but rests on *Jesus' own faith* ("I live by the faith of the Son of God"), "his vicarious and substitutionary faith which embraces and undergirds us" that is "a gift of God" enabling us to "truly and properly believe... in which our faith is laid hold of, enveloped and upheld by his unswerving faithfulness."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 49, alluding to Calvin's observation in his Commentary on Hebrews 6:19, CO55-81: "When the high priest entered into the holy presence of Yahweh in the sanctuary, that he might present all Israel in his person to God, we can say, as Calvin puts it in his commentary on Hebrews, all Israel entered in his person."

<sup>20</sup> J. B. Torrance, "Christ In Our Place" in *A Passion for Christ*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> T. F. Torrance, "Preaching Jesus Christ" in *A Passion for Christ*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.



## The Spirit who Reveals and Conceals

Having established some key christological parameters, I now want to give attention to the ways in which the Holy Spirit functions within the redemptive arc of God's triune relations, particularly with regard to worship. Perhaps the first thing to say is that the Spirit is inseparable from the Son as well as from the Father; the Spirit is indeed the Spirit of the Son and the Spirit of the Father. T. F. Torrance can speak of a sort of reciprocal mediation, the Spirit mediating the Son as the Son mediates the Spirit.<sup>24</sup> As the Spirit conceived the Incarnate Son in Mary's womb, descended upon him, empowered him for his ministry, and shone the spotlight upon him at every stage of his existence, so Jesus prior to his Ascension promised to send that same Spirit to continue his work on earth through his disciples. To be in the Spirit is to be in Christ, which is to be in God.<sup>25</sup>

What makes the Spirit seem particularly elusive to us is the fact that the Spirit is not known directly, pointing away from itself, but at the same time making God known. "He is the invisible Light in whose shining we see the uncreated Light of God manifest in Jesus Christ but he is known himself only in that he lights up for us the Face of God in the Face of Jesus Christ."<sup>26</sup> Though only God knows God, the Spirit of God who knows the depths of God can impart such knowledge to us as he comes to indwell us, giving us access to what would otherwise be unknowable to us.<sup>27</sup> We have the interpreter of the things of God residing within us, translating for us what would be utter gibberish apart from this gracious impartation of God's own self-interpretation through the Spirit. "It is through the Communion of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son that we may know God in his Triune Reality." Through the Spirit "God really does impart himself to us and actually makes himself known to us within the conditions of our creaturely forms of thought and speech...."<sup>28</sup> Yet at the same time as the Spirit reveals, the Spirit also

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<sup>24</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 237.

<sup>25</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 63, 151.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

<sup>28</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 151.

conceals to some extent because “it is in making himself actually known to us through the Son and in the Spirit that God reveals himself as infinitely greater than we can conceive.”<sup>29</sup> The Spirit’s elusive nature serves to guard the transcendent Majesty of God, which restrains us by the Spirit’s sheer holiness from transgressing creaturely bounds and thinking presumptuously of God.<sup>30</sup> Echoing Ephesians 2:18 — “Through the Son we have access to the Father by the Spirit” — we can know God as God is *in himself* because it is *through himself* as Word and Spirit that God is revealed to us. That is to say, we can know truly (i.e., what God reveals to us) but never exhaustively.

An axiom of Torrancean theology is that we know God as God gives himself to be known in God’s reconciling acts in and through the Son, which the Spirit spotlights for us. There is no separating knowing and being. We can only know God in the manner in which God gives himself to be known. Any attempt to circumvent God’s self-revelation by sidestepping the centrality of the Incarnate Son in the interest of arriving at some other spiritual source of knowledge of God independent of the Son<sup>31</sup> is pursuing an alien path. The Spirit has no private purview of knowledge of God hermetically sealed off from the Son and the Father. To reiterate, the Spirit’s job is not to call attention to himself apart from Christ but rather “to focus all attention on Christ, to glorify him, to bear witness to his deity, to testify to his mind and will, and in him and through him to lead us to the Father.”<sup>32</sup> This underscores all the more the importance of stressing that in the Spirit we do not have a mere facsimile of God, a lesser underling, an approximation of God’s Being but rather God giving himself to us to be known, a knowledge grounded in God’s own self-revealing and self-imparting and actualized within us through the Spirit’s presence and activity.<sup>33</sup> That self-revelatory, self-imparting work of the Spirit does not hold us at a distance but rather draws near to us, God speaking personally into

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<sup>29</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 214-215.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 147.

<sup>32</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 253.

<sup>33</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 147.

our hearts “to strike into the depths of our being and liberate us for communion with himself, making us capable of responding to him as Lord and Saviour.”<sup>34</sup>

## The Spirit who Unites

The unitive function of the Spirit has long been a part of the discussion of intratrinitarian relations within God’s Being. Augustine famously spoke of the Spirit as the bond of love between Lover (Father) and Beloved (Son).<sup>35</sup> Torrance refers to the Spirit as God also uniting himself to us,<sup>36</sup> and on other occasions speaking of Christ uniting us with himself through the Spirit.<sup>37</sup> The Spirit not only unites us to Christ but also unites us with one another, baptizing us into the one Lord and one faith.<sup>38</sup>

The unifying nature of the Spirit figures prominently in the incarnational trinitarian model of worship articulated by James Torrance.<sup>39</sup> Tellingly, the Spirit-

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>35</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity* XV.17.24. Cf. Derek Vreeland, “Is the Holy Spirit the Love Between the Father and the Son?” *Missio Alliance* (June 3, 2015), <https://www.missioalliance.org/is-the-holy-spirit-the-love-between-the-father-and-the-son/>. Vreeland refers to Colin Gunton’s note of caution with regard to Augustine’s depiction of the Spirit primarily as the intratrinitarian bond of love between the Father and the Son lest it be interpreted as too insular and insufficiently eschatological. According to Vreeland, Gunton wanted to guard against understanding that bond of love as suggesting a “closed circle” of God’s triune life. Rather, the Spirit’s activity reflects an *outgoing* impulse (e.g., bringing creation into being, empowering Jesus’ missional work in the world, summoning and equipping the church to proclaim and live out the Gospel in the world). The Spirit is integral to the communion of triune persons *reaching out to the other*, a love that is opened toward that which is not itself. Cf. Colin Gunton, *Theology Through the Theologians* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 126-128. Vreeland’s concluding comments are trenchant: “When we as a church pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit we are asking God to enable us with a missional spirit, so that as a community we would be ever focused on the other, the broken, the forgotten, the overlooked, the marred, and the immoral. We remain open not out of duty but out of a love flowing from the heart of the Trinity. We remain open to receive those who would come so that they may be transformed by that love.”

<sup>36</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 294. Also J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace*, 17.

<sup>38</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 292; also T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 30, for a visual diagram depicting what Torrance refers to as the incarnational trinitarian model of worship.

bonded relationship unifying Jesus and the Father occupies center stage. Torrance is quick to point out that it is “not our religious experience, not our faith or repentance or decision, however important these are”<sup>40</sup> but that utterly unique Father-Son relationship in the Spirit that is unequivocally central to worship. The dual incarnational identity of Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man shows the doubly representative nature of his being and mission wherein “Christ is presented to us as the Son living a life of union and communion with the Father in the Spirit... [while simultaneously] presenting himself in our humanity through the eternal Spirit to the Father on behalf of humankind.”<sup>41</sup> The Spirit’s unifying presence undergirds both relational poles — with God and with humankind. Concomitant with that double representation of the Son is a double movement of the Spirit, described in various ways:

... making himself open for our knowing of him in his revelation and in making us open for him in receiving and understanding his revelation... a two-way relation with himself, in which he activates his relation toward us and at the same time activates our relationship toward himself...<sup>42</sup>

... the Spirit speaking the Word of God to the church and creating within it faithful hearing and understanding of the Word, the Spirit testifying to the mighty acts of God in Christ and the Spirit of response to Christ in the church forming it unto the obedience of faith in him...<sup>43</sup>

... [acting] creatively upon the church in the giving of life and the distribution of his manifold gifts but... [bringing] his creative work to its completion or end in the establishment of the church as the Body of Christ, the new sphere of existence in him. He was the Creator Spirit acting always both from the side of God toward man and from the side

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<sup>40</sup> J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 152

<sup>43</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 254-255.

of man toward God.<sup>44</sup>

... a God-manward movement of the Holy Spirit, in creating, in revealing, in renewing us in worship, in giving gifts to the Church... and a man-Godward movement of the Spirit — a priestly, interceding ministry where the Spirit leads us to the Father through Christ... lifting us up into communion with God...a 'vicarious' priestly work of the Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

The notion of participation<sup>46</sup> is frequently employed to depict the effect of the Spirit's work in including us in the loop, so to speak, of the Son's relation with the Father, for "by the Spirit he draws men and women to participate both in his life of worship and communion with the Father and in his mission from the Father to the world."<sup>47</sup> It is indeed James Torrance's signature definition of Christian worship — "our participation through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father," to which are added the qualifying notes "in his vicarious life of worship and intercession"<sup>48</sup> and "in a creaturely way."<sup>49</sup> Having received the adoption of sons [and daughters] into the Son<sup>50</sup> and being lifted up by the Spirit into this communion is vital, as both Torrances see it, for "apart from the communion of the Holy Spirit we could not enjoy the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God the Father." It must be so, for it is through the Spirit's ministrations that God's love is shed into our hearts.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, grace is not a package detachable from the Son but is

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>45</sup> James B. Torrance, unpublished lecture notes from "Two Views of Worship - in Scotland Today," 3.

<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that participation, as the Torrances understand it, does not erase our human involvement but rather establishes its proper place while retaining the centrality of Jesus: "It holds together what WE do and that in which we are given to participate — the Son's communion with the Father and the Son's mission from the Father to the world." - J. B. Torrance, "Christ In Our Place" in *A Passion for Christ*, 51.

<sup>47</sup> James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Also T. F. Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 148-9.

<sup>50</sup> Galatians 4:5 (NIV).

<sup>51</sup> Romans 5:5 (NIV); T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 3.

what has been wrought in and through the person of the Son himself, in what God has done for us in our stead and on our behalf from within his vicarious humanity and is accessed by us through *personal union* with Christ by the Spirit, not merely doled out as a parcel of benefits achieved through Christ's atoning work.. To echo 1 Corinthians 1:30, Christ Jesus has *himself* become for us wisdom from God, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

### **The Objective Spirit who Frees and Personalizes**

A distinct emphasis in the Torrance brothers' thought is the Holy Spirit as God's freedom to be present to God's creation, echoing the Scriptural witness: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."<sup>52</sup> We have already seen this with respect to the Spirit's freedom to mediate and actualize the knowledge of God within us,<sup>53</sup> "making himself open for our knowing of him in his revelation."<sup>54</sup> God is free to make himself accessible to us by communicating to us through the incarnate Son — free to become human as the man Jesus — as well as through imparting the Spirit to actualize his self-giving to us and effect our receiving of him in that self-giving.<sup>55</sup> In saying this we must not reduce such impartation solely to information about God; it is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, God imparting *himself* through the Spirit. In addition, T. F. Torrance cites Basil's depiction of the work of the Spirit as manifesting "God's sovereign freedom to be present to his creatures in the world in order to realise and bring to completion the creative purpose of God in which creatures are established in enduring relations with the holiness and Lordship of God."<sup>56</sup> Paraphrasing Gregory of Nazianzus, Torrance alludes to the Spirit's eschatological work by referring to the Spirit's ministry of "upholding living rational creatures from below and within them... bringing them to their true end or telos in

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<sup>52</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:17 (NIV).

<sup>53</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 203.

<sup>54</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 152.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>56</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 228-229, alluding to Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* 49, 51-53, 55-57, 61-62.

God... [enabling them to] participate in the very life and holiness of God himself."<sup>57</sup> Elsewhere Torrance refers to Basil's notion of the "royal freedom of the Spirit (*C. Macedonium*) who though he is exalted infinitely above and beyond all creatures and all powers of heaven, is yet free to be present to the creature and to fulfil from the side of the creature the perfecting work which binds the creature in relationship to the Creator, and so to realize its life."<sup>58</sup>

In speaking of the Spirit's involvement in fulfilling God's "perfecting work" and purpose within human beings, we must not suppose that the Spirit steamrolls over human creatures to bring them to the telos God envisioned for us. Torrance appeals to yet another ancient church father — Cyril of Jerusalem — to underscore the fact that this is not a coercive impress of the Spirit upon recalcitrant individuals. Rather, "His coming is gentle... with the compassion of a true Guardian, for he comes to save and to heal, to teach, to admonish, to strength, to exhort, to enlighten the mind." Torrance urges us to envision the Spirit as "the creative, energizing, enlightening presence of God who freely interacts with his human creatures in such a way to sustain their relation to himself as the source of their spiritual, personal and rational life.... [H]e does not overwhelm us with might and violence, for his coming is altogether of a different kind,"<sup>59</sup> even though it is with God's "sheer unlimited power" that the Spirit comes to us. He neither crushes our creaturely nature nor overrides our personal individuality but rather as the Personalizing Person comes to emancipate us from our imprisonment in self-centeredness and our narcissistic self-preoccupation, "healing, restoring and deepening human personal being"<sup>60</sup> as well as lifting us out of ourselves to find our true being-in-communion with God and with one another.

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<sup>57</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 229.

<sup>58</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 223.

<sup>59</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 227-228.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 230. Also J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 41.

## **Worship with a Difference**

In speaking of the Spirit's interior work of actualizing within us what has been done for us in Christ's vicarious humanity in our place and the renewing, sustaining, sanctifying, transforming work that the indwelling Spirit effects upon us, we must never confuse our subjective spirits with the objective presence and impact of the Holy Spirit. To blur this distinction is to set ourselves up to be redirected away from the source of our new life in Christ and become unhealthily engrossed in ourselves. The antidote is to recover the objectivity of the indwelling Spirit, through whom we "come up against the relentless attack upon us of God's love incarnated... in the exclusive particularity of Jesus Christ"<sup>61</sup> that saves us from such a distortion.

Despite all that has been said about the decidedly trinitarian incarnational depiction of the Gospel of grace that both T. F. and J.B. Torrance have devoted their life's work to expounding, it might look to some onlookers that corporate worship services which embrace this perspective don't look all that externally different than before. Worshippers still gather together at a prescribed time and sit typically in rows, Scripture is still read, sermons are still preached, prayers are offered in profusion, confession of sin and assurances of pardon have their allotted place and musical contributions in the form of hymn singing, praise choruses, and/or special music from a choir or select musicians are still offered. But the Torrances would contend that beneath the regularity of observable activities is a swirling undercurrent of monumental differences. At the heart of it is this: though we do sing, pray, listen, confess, partake of sacraments, we are not the center of worship. Worship does not hinge on what we do or how worthy we deem our worshipping "performance" to be: we have been blessedly displaced by Jesus, our great High Priest who is present through his Spirit to lead us to the Father that we might be joyfully and gratefully caught up in the wonder of participating in the Son's communion with the Father. "The Holy Spirit renews us by drawing us within the self-consecration of Christ made on our behalf and by assimilating us into his holiness."<sup>62</sup> The Holy Spirit is not the "filler" who has taken the place of Jesus after

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<sup>61</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 227, 235.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-251.



his Ascension back to heaven, "acting in the place of, as if in the absence of, the exalted Lord."<sup>63</sup> It is so elegantly said that I include this lengthy quote in its entirety:

[T]hrough the coming of the Spirit God brings his self-revelation to its fulfilment, for the Spirit is the creative Subject of God's revelation to us and the creative Subject in our reception and understanding of that revelation. The Holy Spirit does not do this by continuing a work begun by Christ and now left off by him, as if we now passed from the economy of the Son in the economy of the Spirit. On the contrary, through the Spirit, in and with his coming, Christ himself returns to be present among us, living and speaking and operating in the Church which through the Spirit is constituted his Body on earth and in history. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church means that it is the living Lord himself who is here in his redeeming and sanctifying activity.<sup>64</sup>

The Spirit "assimilates us into the one all-sufficient worship of Christ," who is himself very much present to gather up our worship and sanctify it with his own, presenting us in him to the Father. Enlivened by our ongoing participation in the triune life of God mediated through God's indwelling Spirit, the Church is called to share in Christ's ongoing ministry within the gathered community as well as sharing in Christ's mission in the world.

We pray, but we do so knowing we have twin allies: the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us when we are clueless about what or how to pray; and Jesus himself who ever lives to intercede for us, joining our paltry attempts with his prayers to sanctify and present them to the Father. The Spirit "makes the intercessions of Christ to echo inaudibly in our hearts" as we join in the Son's cry of "*Abba* Father" as adopted sons and daughters.<sup>65</sup> We are not left on our own in our

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 249-250.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>65</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 154.

stammering attempts to call upon God as we present our praises, petitions or laments.

We take sobering stock of ourselves to confess our sins, knowing that we do not come to a "Contract God"<sup>66</sup> who is all too ready to nail us to them and impose penalties for our failure to meet certain conditions for acceptance. Rather, we dare to come boldly and confidently before the throne of grace, knowing that "we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need"<sup>67</sup> because our brother Jesus has preceded us in taking upon himself all of our failings in order to judge and deliver us from them through his forgiving grace. The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not sentimentalize sin; rather, the Holy Spirit indicts the sin within us that tugs at our heart daily. At the same time we dare to own up to it in the confidence that just as our being forgiven implies being found guilty, we are clothed with the total forgiveness of Jesus which has embraced in our stead the total judgment merited by our sin and absolved us of any condemnation, including us in the new humanity he has wrought for us and now shares with us.<sup>68</sup>

We still listen to Scripture read and proclaimed, but realize that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the biblical writers is present with us to illumine our understanding, to speak personally to us in the depths of our hearts so that the life-giving Word can saturate and sanctify our minds, cleansing our thoughts so as to bring them into closer alignment with God's redemptive purposes. We trust that in the Word proclaimed we hear the grace notes of a God who doesn't "throw us back on ourselves to make our response" to God but who in Christ has "already provided for us that Response which alone is acceptable... the Offering made for humankind in the life obedience and passion of Jesus Christ."<sup>69</sup> We lean into the notion that faith is a "response to a Response already made for us and continually being made for us in Christ."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 72.

<sup>67</sup> Hebrews 4:16 (NIV).

<sup>68</sup> T. F. Torrance, "Preaching Jesus Christ" in *A Passion for Christ*, 28. See also *Theology in Reconstruction*, 221.

<sup>69</sup> J. B. Torrance, "Christ in our Place" in *A Passion for Christ*, 41.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

We baptize, though in doing so we banish any illusion that it is our faith decision, our pious striving, our commitment that saves us. Rather, we cast all reliance on our Lord and Savior Jesus whose baptism in the waters of Jordan in identifying with us sinners culminated in the ultimate baptism of his atoning death and resurrection in our place. By faith we trust that in his representative capacity as our High Priest his self-offering included us and raised us up to new life in and with him. The repeatable rite (*baptismos*) has no converting power in and of itself; it is wholly on the reality (*baptisma*) of Jesus' saving acts for us on our behalf signified by the rite of baptism that we lean. When he died, we died; when he rose, we rose<sup>71</sup>... not merely in some watered-down metaphorical sense but in all actuality attested by God's self-revelation.

We imbibe the elements of the Lord's Supper, not because there is some magical concoction in the elements themselves that will cleanse and renew us with one easy gulp. Rather, we partake in recognition that Jesus is truly present as our great High Priest, "the one true worshipper who unites us to himself by the Spirit in an act of memory and in a life of communion as he lifts us up by word and sacrament into the very triune life of God."<sup>72</sup> We do not harangue ourselves with guilt and crippling self-recrimination for our failings but gladly "participate in his self-consecration and self-offering to the Father... with him and in him and through him before the Majesty of God in worship, praise and adoration with no other sacrifice than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Mediator and High Priest,<sup>73</sup> ever mindful that he who meets us in the present to nurture and empower us by his Spirit will also come in glory in the full pageantry his majesty surely warrants.

### **Music as a Way of Opening Us Up to See and Hear Anew?**

We sing and listen to musical offerings, not merely to entertain or perform but to let the Holy Spirit use the gift of well-ordered sound to open us up to divine realities that point beyond themselves through our sanctified human imagination to Christ

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<sup>71</sup> Romans 6:3-8.

<sup>72</sup> J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 134.

through the medium of music. The one reference to music I found in my foray through the Torrance brothers' writings was James Torrance's statement that "true theology is theology that sings."<sup>74</sup> Most likely he meant that sound theology well-grounded in the Gospel of grace naturally engenders an air of joy rather than fear, guilt or dreaded obligation. He himself composed a hymn.<sup>75</sup> Certainly singing is deeply rooted in the worship life of God's people down through the ages, as the Psalms attest.<sup>76</sup> But I would like to suggest an idea that emerges from the relatively new domain of the interplay between theology, worship and artistic imagination. While the lyrics of hymns and spiritual songs can remind us of God's saving acts and prompt us to lift our hearts in grateful praise, can we not envision the music itself beyond the lyrics as engaging our humanity at an ever more profound level than words can express? The Spirit's intercessions for us "with groanings too deep for words"<sup>77</sup> suggest such a level of engagement is possible. If Jesus embraced to the fullest extent the very human nature we inhabit, is it stretching the boundaries too much to imagine that the human capacity to make music, to be moved by it, might be a vehicle through which the Spirit can reach beyond our defenses, turning our hearts toward Christ and opening us up more fully to God?<sup>78</sup> Could the arts, and specifically music here, harbor an ability "to reunite the intellect with the other facets of our human make-up — our bodies, wills, emotional life, and so on" in such

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<sup>74</sup> J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 10.

<sup>75</sup> "I Know Not How To Pray" by J. B. Torrance, "Christ In Our Place" in *A Passion for Christ*, 53.

<sup>76</sup> The Spirit's activity of "lifting up all creation in praise and rejoicing in God" (T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 242) would strongly suggest that happening through musical expression.

<sup>77</sup> Romans 8:26.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. N. T. Wright Online, "Get Me A Musician! - II Kings 3:15," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPKMyQOh-XY>. In this brief podcast Wright insightfully contends that "music like the arts in general — like painting, poetry, dance, all sorts of things — music is a way of stirring up the imagination, and the imagination is one of the faculties with which we humans perceive that larger world than the rather shrunken world we are always tempted to live in — the larger world within which God the Creator is doing new creation, is redeeming us, is rescuing us, and is bring us forward in his purposes.... [T]hese may be ways in which we can draw out fresh meaning, fresh meaning from God, fresh meaning in the world. Then it may be that the arts, and not least music, can be used as a way of cracking things open, a way of opening the darkened rooms in which we so often live and letting in the light of God's truth."

a way that "it takes us beyond the surface in some sense to see or experience something which otherwise remains hidden from us"?<sup>79</sup> Trevor Hart suggests such possibilities in his discussion of the incarnation and artistry, seeing the incarnational "taking flesh" of the Son as lending "a significant theological warrant for a human project of imaginative creativity such as all art involve," even venturing the intriguing thought that "the God of Scripture... is the first and last patron of the arts."<sup>80</sup> The following series of quotes convey a sense of the kind of rich, provocative out-of-the-box interplays between art and theological reflection that tease our sensibilities and entice further reflection:

The artist... sees more or otherwise than what is generally perceptible, and symbolizes her vision that others may share it. Her art grants 'eyes to see and ears to hear' to those whose seeing and hearing is otherwise less full, or differently focused and attuned.<sup>81</sup>

[Referring to the painter Wassily Kandinsky:] The realm within which he perceives artistic meaning as rooted is not subjective. The 'inner need' (of artist and beholder) and the 'inner meaning' (of physical objects) to which he repeatedly alludes are not products of human subjectivity, but means by which humans as essentially spiritual beings, are meshed into or related to the wider spiritual network of the real. Artistic creativity, therefore, is for him not a matter of *sheer* creativity so much as a discernment of the true meaning of a world existing beyond the artist's subjectivity.<sup>82</sup>

If Christian faith apprehends more than the humanity of Jesus... it certainly apprehends nothing less.... That God has graciously placed himself in our midst for touching, hearing and seeing means that this same 'physical' and historical manifestation must always be the place

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<sup>79</sup> Trevor Hart, *Beholding the Glory. Incarnation Through the Arts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001, 9.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

where we put ourselves in our repeated efforts to know him again and ever more fully. We cannot appreciate Mozart's artistry unless the sound of his music remains our constant companion; we may appreciate more than the sounds themselves, but never less. There is something more than the 'flesh' to be considered, but the two levels must be held together inseparably if the essential significance of each is not to slip from our grasp.<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps in our attempts to recover a chastened theology of worship that is more consonant with the incarnational-trinitarian markers replete throughout the biblical witness, we might consider allowing the winds of the Spirit to blow more freely across the terrain of our lives to open us up afresh in the deepest recesses of our being to the Gospel of grace by means of some level of artistic engagement. And just perhaps the Spirit might harness the creative power of music toward such an end to help us "reimagine a too-familiar theology"<sup>84</sup> that has lost its connection with the High Priestly mediation of Christ, which summons us by the Spirit and enables us through union with the Son to find our true being-in-communion with God and one another.

In all our knowledge and proclamation of God in worship and witness we make use of human and earthly forms of thought and speech, cognitive, linguistic or liturgical forms... In themselves they are merely expressions of human and earthly activity and reveal no God but man. If they are really to serve their purpose they must be made to point beyond themselves to the divine realities they are meant to signify. That can happen only through the power of the Holy Spirit as he himself testifies of God in and through them, for he alone can make the forms of faith and witness transparent by making the Reality of God shine through them.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>84</sup> Jeremy Begbie, "Through Music: Sound Mix" in *Beholding the Glory*, 139.

<sup>85</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 257.

It is a difficult task for pastors and congregations to break free from well-grooved patterns and habits that are deeply entrenched in the belief that worship is primarily centered on what we do. The Torrance brothers have posed a serious challenge to the Church to reconsider that all-too-common assumption. Through their writings they exhort the Church to reframe its theology as well as actual practice of worship unapologetically around a more solidly trinitarian, Christocentric framework wherein Jesus Christ is not only the object of worship but the ever-present leader of our worship as well through the Holy Spirit. The creative ways in which the Spirit is constantly at work aligning believers with the redemptive tempo of corporate worship as well as actualizing our participation in the dynamic grace-filled life of the Triune God is both indispensable and awe-inspiring. What an invaluable, if sometimes underestimated, gift the Torrances have bequeathed to Christian communities of faith everywhere!





## BOOK REVIEW

Simeon Zahl

### *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020

Much Protestant theology has a chronic heart problem. From the later Luther up through Barth, Torrance, and Kathryn Tanner, it has suffered from a diminished role for personal experience in theologizing. Fearing fanaticism, subjectivism, and anthropocentrism, Protestant theologians have swung to the opposite extreme of building cerebral systems of doctrine that never touch people's lived and felt realities. This condition could prove terminal as it alienates post-Christendom Westerners from Christianity. So runs Cambridge theologian Simeon Zahl's diagnosis. His prescription is to rehabilitate the role of experience in theology by 1) norming Christian experience by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit; 2) retrieving Augustine's and the early Reformers' insights into the emotional effects associated with soteriological doctrine; and 3) drawing social-scientific "affect theory" into dialogue with theology to produce an "affective Augustinianism."

Affect theory requires some introduction as an account of what it means to be human. To its right stands essentialism's supposition of a monolithic, unvarying human nature. On its left lies social constructivism's kaleidoscopic view of endlessly diverse and malleable human identity. Affect theory locates continuity among humans across time and space in the *affects*—durable structures of emotion formed in our bodies by evolutionary pressures. Yet individuals and societies may *organize* and *interpret* these affects in various ways, thus allowing for real but not infinite diversity. Like children's alphabetical building blocks, the affects may be arranged and rearranged to spell different words and construct different shapes. Zahl finds affect theory highly congenial to Augustinian and Lutheran theology.

Jerome Van Kuiken, review of Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), "Participatio 10: "The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience" (2022): 229-233. *Participatio* is distributed by the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

After surveying all the above in his introduction, Zahl offers two methodological chapters, three chapters applying his method to soteriology, and a conclusion that combines retrospect and prospect. Chapter 1 traces the troubled yet inescapable role of experience in the history and practice of theology. Zahl presents evidence for the use of experience as a resource for theological reflection in the apostolic church, Augustine, the early Luther, Karlstadt, the Pietists and revivalists, and Schleiermacher. Yet the excesses associated with this openness to experience led to its rejection by the later Luther, Protestant Scholastics, Enlightenment rationalists, and Barth. Zahl detects a false dilemma afoot, as if the only choices were either to make experience theology's basis or to abandon it entirely. Instead, experience is simply the context in which all doctrine is worked out and lived out.

Chapter 2 aims to avoid the excesses of fanaticism and subjectivism on the one hand and, on the other, the "*complacency with theological abstractions*" (70; italics his) demonstrated by Torrance and Tanner. Zahl finds his golden mean by employing pneumatology to regulate theological resourcing of experience. This means privileging particularly Christian, biblically patterned experiences of the Holy Spirit over allegedly universal, generic "religious experience." Zahl also prioritizes common Christian experiences of the affective effects of the Spirit (e.g. love, joy, peace) over uncommon experiences (e.g. charismata, mystical ecstasies). With these filters in place, he intends to reconnect doctrine to experience by identifying "*practically recognizable*" ways that the Spirit influences Christians (69; italics his).

Chapter 3 begins the soteriological application of this method by retrieving the Reformation doctrine of forensic justification. Zahl decries recent trends among Protestants to dismiss this doctrine as an emotionally unappealing piece of "legal fiction" and to flirt instead with *theosis* and "participation." He weighs Torrance's and Tanner's participationist soteriologies and finds them just as wanting in practical, affective import as the forensic soteriology they supposedly supplant. By contrast, Neo-Thomistic participationism does speak clearly about its experiential implications, but Zahl finds unbelievable its doctrine of "instantaneous implantation of new moral powers" (8) and its optimism about progressive sanctification. Instead he returns to Melancthon's doctrine of justification. Melancthon writes movingly of how faith in the objective reality of our justification brings subjective relief from

dread of God's wrath. Melanchthon also holds together justification with Spirit-wrought regeneration, which produces the practical effects of love for God and mortification of sin. Yet Christians will continue to struggle with lifelong sin—no Neo-Thomistic optimism here! Lastly, insofar as Melanchthon's doctrine of justification includes affective changes, it overlaps with ancient Christian theologies of *theosis* (though not Torrance's and Tanner's overly-objectified versions).

Chapter 4 sets forensic justification in the context of Luther's law-and-gospel dialectic in conversion and asks after its contemporary relevance. The Reformers could assume a lively sense of sin and guilt before God in their audience; not so in today's secular environment. The doctrine of original sin thus has become implausible and, with it, the gospel of justification by faith. Here affect theory comes to Luther's aid. Secular people still experience feelings of unworthiness, rejection, and fear of death, along with yearnings for peace and justice. They still are prone to self-deception and an inability to do what they know is right. All the affects still are the same even though their interpretation has changed. The Christian task is to reframe these affects within the doctrines of sin and grace that reveal their true significance. That significance is, for Luther, that negative affects signal the Holy Spirit's use of God's law to convict us of sin and drive us to Christ. The Spirit then uses the gospel to replace negative affects with positive ones.

Chapter 5 applies Zahl's method to the doctrine of sanctification. Once more he critiques Torrance for dislocating doctrine from experience and Neo-Thomists for teaching infused virtue and progressive sanctification. Augustine pioneered a preferable perspective on sanctification: the Holy Spirit works providentially through the circumstances of the believer's life to stir up love for holiness and hatred of sin, yet Christians generally make little progress in sanctification and even the saintliest remain sinful. Zahl sees a close fit between Augustine's doctrine and affect theory. A combined "affective Augustinianism" yields four benefits: 1) Rather than forcing Christian experience into a one-size-fits-all pattern (say, a revivalistic conversion narrative) to determine if a person is saved or not, we may allow for the Spirit's freedom to grant diverse experiences or even to labor long at undetectable levels to prepare for sudden affective about-faces. 2) Against the current fashion for virtue ethics, we must accept that the affects are too sturdy to be radically

altered by habituation. Spiritual practices have their place but are not a panacea for our stubborn depravity. 3) As bodily realities, the affects link us to the whole human community across time and the material world in which it evolved. Thus, the Spirit's sanctifying activity upon our affects has social and political as well as personal implications. 4) The disappointing phenomenon of "Christian mediocrity" is easily explained: the affects lack plasticity. It is up to the sovereign Spirit of God, not us, when and how they change. If we feel sin's weight, we may interpret that as the Spirit's law-applying conviction so that, sooner or later, we may experience the joy of the gospel. But we need not fear that our justification is in jeopardy.

In his Conclusion, Zahl recaps his key points and urges further theological study of the emotions. He also recommends the application of his method to other areas related to pneumatology (such as charismata, prayer, the sacraments, and the Spirit-mediated relationship between the historical Jesus and Christians of every place and time), as well as to the hamartiological question of the relationship of sin to human biological and psychological structures. Finally, he positions "affective Augustinianism" as a third option for Protestants besides Thomistic progressive perfectionism and Barthian suspicion of subjectivity and the sciences. Zahl is especially hopeful that his approach will foster dialogue between modern academic theology and the Pentecostal and charismatic movements.

Zahl's ambitious work deserves commendation on several fronts. He invites contemporary Protestants and post-Christians to rediscover the life-changing gospel in Reformation teaching. He safeguards against subjectivism by his normative use of Scripture and doctrine along with the ancillary use of the sciences. He cautions against an account of sanctification that depends more on Aristotle than the Paraclete. On these points, Zahl's project pairs well with Torrance's.

Zahl himself treats Torrance largely as a foil for his own proposals, recycling the standard canard that Torrance's theology lacks practicality—or, in Zahl's memorable phrase, that "Torrance's soteriology . . . functions as a kind of pneumatological Docetism: it has no real connection to bodies" (99). Torrance

scholars have answered this claim as it relates to *ethos*.<sup>1</sup> Zahl, though, is more concerned with *pathos*. Unfortunately, he neglects evidence from the very works of Torrance's that he cites. For instance, he repeatedly lifts abstract metaphysical quotes from *The Trinitarian Faith* and *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (see Zahl's pp. 71-72, 95-99, 184-85) but ignores *Trinitarian Faith's* Chapter 1: "Faith and Godliness," which foregrounds the affective necessity of reverence, as well as *Atonement's* experientially-rich epilogue. There is also a certain irony when Zahl borrows from Karen Kilby to accuse Torrance of such vagueness as to open the door to "all sorts of projection" (71-74): Kilby actually deplores theologians' saying *too much* lest projection occur, while Zahl objects to saying *too little*.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, Zahl's "affective Augustinianism" rightly challenges us to attend to the experiential implications of doctrine. It also offers a fruitful avenue for further research. For instance, how might Zahl's affective account of sanctification shed light on Christ's atoning union with fallen human nature? On the other hand, might the radical healing of that nature by Christ as actualized in us by the Holy Spirit counteract Zahl's pessimism about the incorrigibility of the affects? Do Christ's miraculous incarnation and resurrection yield any basis for the "instantaneous implantation of new moral powers" that Zahl doubts—to say nothing of other new powers that his would-be Pentecostal and charismatic interlocutors embrace? Are all "worldly" emotions always already the Spirit's application of law and gospel, so that all that's needed is to *reinterpret* them in Christian terms, or does the Spirit specially supervene on human affects so as to *transpose* them into a qualitatively higher register?<sup>3</sup> Whatever doctrinal conclusions we reach on these matters, Zahl would have us reckon with how they touch our hearts.

*Jerome Van Kuiken*

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Todd Speidell, *Fully Human in Christ: The Incarnation as the End of Christian Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016); E. Jerome Van Kuiken, "Not I, but Christ': Thomas F. Torrance on the Christian Life," in Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 243–57.

<sup>2</sup> Quotation from p. 72. Zahl draws on Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 957 (2000), pp. 439–43.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. C. S. Lewis, "Transpositions," in his *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1949, 1976, 1980), 91–115.



## RESPONSE TO VAN KUIKEN

**Simeon Zahl**

**Professor of Christian Theology, University of Cambridge**

smz21@cam.ac.uk

*This brief essay provides a response by the author to Jerome Van Kuiken's review of The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience. It clarifies the scope of the critique of Torrance's soteriology made in that book, and contends that the review has not fully responded to the force of the argument made. It then provides initial responses to some of the excellent questions about sin and the Holy Spirit raised by Van Kuiken in the review.*

I am honored by Jerome Van Kuiken's thoughtful and detailed review of *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, and grateful for this opportunity to respond. It is especially pleasing to be read with such care in this particular journal, as the book includes, as Van Kuiken notes, an extended and largely critical engagement with the soteriology of T.F. Torrance.

*The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* is a book shaped out of number of significant threads over nearly a decade of writing, and few reviews have managed as well as this one to engage with so many of its themes in the short compass necessitated by the review format. I was particularly glad to see one feature drawn out that has too often been missed: the way that Scripture functions in my account as a kind of regulating norm for pneumatological speech, as Van Kuiken puts it, that helps us to avoid the worst dangers of theological appeals to experience

Simeon Zahl, "Response to Van Kuiken," *Participatio* 10: "The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience" (2022): 235-240. *Participatio* is distributed by the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

without at the same time so overdetermining the work of the Spirit that we lose sight of freedom of the Spirit that blows where the Spirit wills. I note this example because it speaks to the quality of Van Kuiken's reading more generally: to have noticed how important and also how subtle the role of Scripture is in the book is to have read the book as a whole with deep understanding, generosity, and care.

Here I will respond first to Van Kuiken's comments on my reading of Torrance, and then to the excellent and generative questions he asks of me at the end. On the subject of Torrance, Van Kuiken reads the book as "recycling the standard canard that Torrance's theology lacks practicality." But to recycle something one must first have had possession of it. In the present case I must confess I was unaware of this "standard canard"; for better or worse, my critique arises not from having read earlier critics of Torrance, but simply from the experience of reading Torrance for myself with questions about pneumatology and soteriological experience in view.

In terms of the substance of my critique, I offer a clarification and a reassertion. The clarification is that my critique of Torrance in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* has a very specific and deliberately calibrated scope. My argument is that, in his major discussions of the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation and sanctification, Torrance's theology exhibits in particularly clear form a pattern of theological argument and speech that is in fact quite widespread in modern theology, and that this mode of theological speech is theologically problematic without being "wrong" in the strict sense of making claims that are untrue. The pattern I am referring to is that of describing the change that Christian salvation makes for the Christian<sup>1</sup> overwhelmingly in terms of its metaphysical effects in the soul and *coram deo* rather than also in terms of its practically recognizable effects on the experiences Christians have in their bodies and in time. Grace, for Torrance, I argue, does a great deal to us in our "ontological depths" (for many examples of such language in Torrance, see p. 98), but it is not clear that it does much at all that would be noticeable or make a practical difference in the concrete experiences of Christians. Again, my argument is not that descriptions about changes in our

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<sup>1</sup> Most precisely, the change that the Holy Spirit makes in the Spirit's work of mediating justification and sanctification to human beings; or to put it more simply, the change that grace makes.



“ontological depths” through union with Christ are necessarily untrue, but rather that left on their own—i.e., unaugmented by other, more directly experiential modes of description—they are reflective of an inadequately pneumatological understanding of grace that can have, and often has had, important downstream negative effects on theology’s ability to make a difference in Christian lives. And I show how the soteriologies of Philip Melanchthon and Saint Augustine, in particular, provide powerful alternative models to what we find in Torrance and others, integrating the ontological and the experiential in salvation in a highly sophisticated and plausible way.

As I state in the book, pointing out this specific problem in Torrance does not mean that his soteriology does not have other strengths or that it does not help meet other challenges in modern theological reflection on the nature and meaning of Christian salvation (p. 96). And indeed, the discussion of Torrance in the book is mainly there in order to illustrate a problem that I find afflicts a great deal of recent Protestant theology well beyond Torrance himself. What my analysis of Torrance does mean, however, I suggest, is that going forward soteriologies that seek to learn from and think with Torrance need to acknowledge what has now been identified as a real and consistent weakness in his thought, and to seek new constructive pathways that can provide the kind of experiential integration in descriptions of the workings of divine grace that (as I argue in Chapter Two of the book) good pneumatology dogmatically requires.

Van Kuiken points to other parts of Torrance that do seem to exhibit more of the affective integration I find lacking across a range of texts, and that is all to the good. But this does not change the fact of the existence of the rhetorical and theological pattern I identify as a standard trope in his argumentation across a wide range of instances at the heart of his descriptions of his soteriological vision (for many examples, see pp. 96-99). It also does not so far as I can see change the fact that this pattern is fully consistent with the anxiety about appeals to experience that is evident in Torrance’s early essays on the Spirit, with their regular reference to the errors of “Neo-Protestant subjectivism” (see pp. 99-101). If I have one disappointment in this otherwise excellent and engaging review, then, it is that my critical charge against Torrance’s one-notedly ontological soteriology is more

substantial, and far more evidence-supported, than Van Kuiken seems willing to acknowledge, and this seems a missed opportunity. I am pleased however to note Myk Habets' essay in the same issue of this journal that more fully recognizes the seriousness of my critique and presses for new paths forward with and beyond Torrance that take account of what I think we now must acknowledge is a genuine and important weakness in his otherwise generative and formidable thought.

Van Kuiken also raises a series of further questions that emerge from the soteriological vision articulated in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, and I conclude with a few brief responses to these excellent questions. To start, he asks whether the "radical healing" of fallen human nature by Christ through his atoning union with us might be grounds to push back against or complexify the "pessimism" I express in the book about the "incurability of the affects" (what I call the problem of "non-transformation"). One part of an answer would be that I do affirm quite clearly, with Augustine, that the Holy Spirit does at various times and in various ways act to move and change us by reordering our desires. So I am by no means committed to an *absolute* incurability of sinful affects. And I fully agree that any account of such movement and change must have its basis in the work of Christ, actualized by the Spirit.

At the same time—and this is perhaps the more interesting thing to say—there are good reasons to think that whatever the nature of the healing Christ has achieved for us, a great deal of the appropriation of that healing work to us clearly lies in the eschatological future. The key analogy, I am convinced, is with physical death, which is closely allied with sin in Scripture (Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:12-28) as well as in the dogmatic implications of Christ's death and resurrection (i.e., the fact that scripturally and dogmatically the defeat of death and the defeat of sin are a single synchronic divine act). In the incarnation and resurrection, we must say without reservation, Christ has definitively and permanently defeated death. And yet, the nature of Christ's defeat of death is such that Christians, like all human beings, remain universally subject to physical death in our embodied lives. In the same way, I suggest, Christ has definitively and permanently healed human nature, even as we at the same time remain radically sinful, fallen creatures in this life. In other words, the same complexity—the word *mystery* is not entirely

inappropriate here—that we find in Christ’s paradoxical defeat of a death that we are nevertheless still subject to obtains in the relationship between the finality and irreversibility of Christ’s healing work and our ongoing subjection to sin. Here I would appeal to the abiding theological and pastoral power of Luther’s description of the Christian as *simul iustus et peccator*. Just as it is somehow right to say that each Christian is both fully justified and yet still fully a sinner, so, I suggest, it is also right to say that we are fully healed and yet still deadly ill, fully enslaved to the death of the body and yet radically and permanently free of death’s tyranny.

Equally generative to me is Van Kuiken’s final question, about whether in my view “all ‘worldly’ emotions [are] always already the Spirit’s application of law and gospel, so that all that’s needed is to *reinterpret* them in Christian terms,” or is it instead that the Spirit specially “supervenes” on human affects “so as to *transpose* them into a qualitatively higher register?” This is an excellent and incisive question about the relationship between nature and grace, and is one that I left open-ended in the book.<sup>2</sup> And I confess that although I am glad to be pressed, I find it difficult to give a single definitive answer. On the one hand, my view of divine providence is such that I am instinctually suspicious of easy appeals to distinctions between natural and supernatural workings of God’s Spirit in God’s world. Too often this move has been used to deny the theological significance of the body and the deep union of body and soul in Christian thought shaped by the incarnation. On the other hand, there really is something different that seems to emerge when we come to view specific events, emotions, and experiences as directly constitutive in some sense of God’s saving work in our lives.

What I do think I can do with some confidence is to articulate two further principles which might help guide an answer without resolving Van Kuiken’s question entirely. The first principle is that the “interpreter” that actually matters when our experiences of certain negative and positive affects get “*reinterpreted*” as law and gospel is not us but the Holy Spirit. As Luther points out, the Spirit alone is the true “user” of the law and it is the Spirit alone who can truly mediate the gospel

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<sup>2</sup> I do speak quite positively of the neo-Thomist vision as having its chief strength here, in the subtle and sophisticated relation such theology articulates between natural affects and the workings of grace (see pp. 108-112). My significant worries about the neo-Thomist approach to grace are on other grounds, as I explain in the book.

to us. However, whether the Spirit in a given case is already using “worldly” or natural emotions without us realizing it, or else only at a certain point “supervenes” to transpose such affects into the work of divine grace, is not something we will be able to reliably determine in advance through the application of a theological principle alone. An implication of this is that the challenge of discerning the Spirit in such cases is one that proves a fair bit easier to meet *in practice* than *in theory*. In other words, the question from our end is never really finally something like, “Are all negative affects that follow a certain pattern instances of the law?” Rather, it is always a more specific question in practice: “Might what Susan or Andy is experiencing right now in fact be the work of the Spirit in their lives to bring them to God, even if they don’t yet realize it?” The latter, I hope it is clear, is the far more useful and productive question, both theologically and pastorally.

Second, if I am at all right in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, then it is a great mistake to assume, as Protestant theologians too often have, that “worldly emotions” in a given case are *definitely not* (or not yet) the work of the Spirit because they do not yet appear to be directly “about” one’s relationship with God. Who are we to say, mysteries to ourselves as we are? Certainly God often uses our discourse, our religious labels, and our theological interpretations of our experiences in his work in us. But it is equally certain that God is not bound by these linguistic and conceptual instruments, that he is not waiting around for us to interpret things with the right labels before acting, and indeed that we are on very strong theological ground when we say that his deepest interest is in our affective, motivational, and desiderative life, even when that life is opaque to us. “For the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” (1 Sam 16:7 NRSVUE) For all of these reasons, I remain convinced that the greater theological danger is not that of mistakenly interpreting some negative experience as divine conviction when actually it isn’t. The greater danger is of missing the work the Spirit is already doing because our concepts and our language haven’t yet caught up with our hearts.