

Todd H. Speidell, "Interview with Paul D. Molnar," *Participatio* 11: "The Priority of Grace in the Theology of T. F. Torrance" (2023), 81-97; #2023-THS-2. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike.

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL D. MOLNAR

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TS: How did you first become interested in the theology of TFT?

PM: I first became interested in the theology of TFT when I read his *Reality and Evangelical Theology* back in 1982. I found his arguments to be much more consistently theological than the material I had been reading from Karl Rahner prior to that. Of course, I also found that his thinking was in harmony in many ways with the views of Karl Barth which I had learned while earning my Ph.D. at Fordham in 1980. I recall presenting a paper at the College Theology Society offering a critique of Rahner's theology in 1984. In a conversation afterward with another Catholic theologian I was asked who my favorite modern theologian was—aside from Karl Barth. He thought I'd say it was Rahner. Instead, I said it was T. F. Torrance. He never heard of him. I suspect things might be different today! At least I hope so.

TS: I first met TFT when he lectured at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1981, which became the book you mentioned. I was a young MDiv student who was reading theology that wasn't very theological! It also struck me that CalTech had invited him to lecture there while he was lecturing at Fuller. I asked him what it was like to lecture at Fuller and CalTech at the same time, and he said: The scientists understand me better than the theologians! He had a sly sense of humor. From your perspective as a theologian, what do you think he was suggesting for an authentic evangelical theology?

PM: That is an interesting and revealing remark by TFT. The scientists he mentioned clearly were aligned with his view of scientific theology, namely, a way of thinking that allowed the object under consideration to determine the truth what is thought and said. I think Torrance was suggesting that if theologians were to think objectively instead of grounding their theology either in their existential reaction to the Gospel or in the way they think about the Gospel, then their own theology would avoid what he called "deistic" dualism. He believed that when the "ontological relation of a set of statements to the realities to which they are meant to refer is cut or damaged" and "the objective reference is suspended" then theological statements either refer "to the subject who made them, in which case they are to be understood as forms of his life, expressive of the states of his consciousness or the attitude of mind he takes up ... they cannot refer to things as they are but only to their appearances" (*Ground and Grammar*, 33-4). Or one might interpret the statements "in terms of the interrelations of the statements with one another" in which case the ontological relation with reality would be broken once more since such thinking would be "confined to their syntactical meaning" and "the semantic focus of statements collapses on itself" (*ibid.*, 34). He concluded, rightly, I think that when either of these approaches is taken then one is "confined to a form of existentialism" since statements then would only reflect a person's attitude toward existence and the focus would then be on that person's "self-understanding" instead of upon the object, which should dictate the proper understanding of reality. This prevents us from knowing being "in its inner relations" and thus never escapes "Kantian dualism" (*ibid.*, 34-5). On the other hand, language philosophy which is linked to positivist and nominalist views of science also denies that we can know things in themselves and also fails to escape Kantian dualism. Torrance then made

the connection of all this to theology noting that if such statements as “The Word was made flesh,” “God is love,” “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” were cut off from their objective reference to God himself acting for us in Christ as he did, then speaking of an act of God within such a “deistic disjunction between God and the world” would make it impossible to grasp their theological meaning. Truth would be lost because statements understood in that way would be construed mythologically as “expressing man’s feeling of dependence on God and the understanding of himself in the world in which he lives” (ibid, 35-6). In other words, theological statements would no longer be governed by who God is and what God does within history but would only describe “ourselves as dependent on God” (ibid., 26). Statements about Jesus Christ would be “turned round into being statements about the meaning he has for us in our freedom to be ourselves and to live a life of self-commitment in faith and love” (ibid.). All of these remarks which are found in his book, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, clearly functioned in a basic way throughout his important book, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*.

TS: In what ways do the theologies of KB and TFT influence you in similar and different ways.

PM: This is an excellent question. It would require at least a book chapter and possibly a book to answer. I have written on this specific issue as it relates to their theologies. Most recently, I discussed their similarities and differences in the chapter entitled “Thomas F. Torrance and Karl Barth: Similarities and Differences,” in the *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (London: T&T Clark, 2020), pp. 67-84. But your question concerns how their theologies influence me in similar and different ways. Briefly (I hope) I would say that I find the fact that both of them insist upon the centrality of Jesus Christ and enact their theological approaches by allowing Jesus Christ in his uniqueness as God incarnate to shape all that they think and say. That approach shaped their views of Christology, the Trinity, Revelation and theological method—just to name a few important doctrines or issues. Additionally, they genuinely sought to explicate their theological epistemologies within a properly understood doctrine of justification by grace and faith. That is something that you simply do not see in many contemporary approaches to theology, especially on the Catholic side. It is

because they both identify revelation with the fact that the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to God that they take the problem of sin seriously when constructing their theologies. However, that means that they allow their views of sin and salvation to be dictated by the fact that both our sin and salvation are disclosed in the life history of Jesus himself. It is because our sin is really forgiven sin in him that we can understand it properly through the grace of God. There are some differences of course. One of them is Torrance's attempt to construct what he called his "new" natural theology. I have criticized that attempt because, even according to Torrance's own positive theology, our minds are twisted and in-turned and thus in need of Christ's reconciling grace to know God truly. If that is true then his "new" natural theology, which he says must function within revelation, is not in fact a natural theology in any traditional sense at all. It is quite frankly a theology of reconciled human nature reflecting on the triune God in faith. I think Torrance might have been misled with an analogy he took from Einstein, namely, the idea that natural theology, like Euclidian geometry was problematic in that natural theology functions independently of revelation, just as Euclidian geometry functions independently of physics. Hence, each needed to be *completed* beyond that independent function in revelation as it concerns theology and in physics as it concerns science. He wrote: "Far from being swallowed up by physics, however, geometry would become the epistemological structure in the heart of physics, although considered in itself it would be incomplete without physics" *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, p. 33. The problem with this is that natural theology requires a complete metanoia according to Torrance, such that it really is not just incomplete without revelation, but stands in conflict with the God revealed in Jesus Christ apart from faith, grace and revelation in its identity with Christ himself. Another notable area of disagreement between the two theologians concerned the nature of the sacraments. George Hunsinger has called attention to that in a number of his important writings on that subject.

TS: When I first started studying theology in my young 20s with RSA, GWB, and TFT, GWB was especially adamant that I avoid contemporary theology, which he considered faddish, and focus instead on a genuine evangelical theology like that of TFT. Why have you have engaged several contemporary theologies as a proponent of TFT's kind of trinitarian-incarnational theology?

PM: The simple answer to your question is that when I was in graduate school at Fordham in the 1970's my advisor, who was a Presbyterian Minister teaching us the theology of Karl Barth, had me read Charles Norris Cochrane's book, *Christianity and Classical Culture*. In it he said that the early church theologians somewhat ungenerously thought the best way to teach positive Christian doctrine was through the errors of their opponents. That is certainly what Irenaeus and Athanasius did in their historical settings with the former opposing Gnosticism and the latter opposing Arianism.

So, to answer your question, the reason I have engaged a number of contemporary theologies as a proponent of TFT's incarnational-trinitarian theology is to illustrate the truth of the Gospel from within a reasonable understanding of the Nicene faith which has united all Christians since the fourth century. When, with the help of Torrance, one sees the real connection between the incarnation and atonement and how these doctrines are shaped by a proper view of the Trinity, then the positive force of Torrance's clear grasp of salvation by grace through faith drives me to expose those views which exemplify basic commitments to forms of self-justification in doctrine and practice! When I engage such problematic theologies, I do so not only to sharpen my understanding of a proper view of the Trinity, Christology and Salvation but in order to set the truth of the Gospel before people over against misleading contemporary views that function on the assumption that theology is something we do to create a better world. In a certain sense, I hope to show that there is a notorious connection between heresies that arose in the early church and today. Colin Gunton once said that he thought the favorite heresy of the twentieth century was Arianism. I think he was right. So, my goal is to explain that if we don't pay attention to the truth as it was seen and understood centuries ago, then we will fall prey to new ideas that seem inviting and helpful but that are completely wrong and misleading, since they really are ideas that were rejected for good reason by real theologians centuries ago. That is why I so strongly oppose the panentheism of Moltmann, and the flimsy thinking of Sallie McFague and her teacher Gordon Kaufman. McFague and Kaufman were both unmistakably Arian theologians who flatly rejected Jesus's uniqueness and claimed that it was mythology to try to ground theology within the immanent Trinity. McFague maintained that Jesus was not ontologically different from any other human being

who manifested God's love. Kaufman said we should forthrightly reject the idea that God really was in Christ reconciling the world to himself because no one human being could have that sort of significance. A lot of people follow their thinking that God, Christ and salvation are no more than symbols Christians invest with meaning that comes from us in our attempts to overcome social and ecological problems. If that is at all true, then in that very procedure the roles of Creator and creature have already been reversed and the idea that we can create a better world fails to notice the real problem of sin as self-will and the real meaning of salvation which is that Jesus Christ overcame our self-will and enmity toward God created by our attempts to live by relying only on ourselves using theological language. I think it is really important for people to see that when we speak of Christ as the Lord and Savior and of God as the one who loves in freedom we are not just reifying concepts, as Kaufman believed. That is because we don't think the truth of our theological concepts comes *from* us at all! That is something that really needs to be seen and stated with clarity today in a society where people honestly believe that gender is no more than a human construct and that God is a symbol we can define and re-define as we wish to achieve a social or political goals. I hope that answers your question!

TS: I will say that despite GWB's dismissive attitude toward the many contemporary theologies of our day and age, he was personally concerned with human needs both on a personal and social level, but he did not think both theologically and practically that the multifarious theologies of our contemporary context were of actual help. In your most recent work, you suggest the same on both fronts. Is that an accurate assessment that you find today's politicized and anthropomorphized theologies as bankrupt on multiple levels, especially for humans in need of God's grace — which is largely absent as a common theme in the whole world of so-called "contemporary theology"?

PM: I have to say that I am in complete agreement with you that much contemporary theology is politicized and anthropomorphized and bankrupt because so many prominent theologians fail to notice the real meaning of sin just because they refuse to allow Jesus himself through his death on the cross and resurrection to inform their understanding of sin and salvation. That's why so many today seem

to believe that theology is an ideology we use to create a better world. That, in my view, is the epitome of self-justification! Since we as Christians actually live by God's forgiving grace, we simply cannot begin good theology with ourselves and our best insights. We really must allow Jesus himself to have the *first* and *final* Word. That's what it means to live by grace. He judges us by calling us away from self-reliance to reliance on him. Perhaps one brief example here will help.

In her book, *She Who Is*, Elizabeth Johnson claims that it is "Through women's encounter with the holy mystery of their own selves as blessed" that we acquire "commensurate language about holy mystery in female metaphor and symbol ... To give but one example, conversion experienced not as giving up oneself but as tapping into the power of oneself simultaneously releases understanding of divine power not as dominating power-over but as the passionate ability to empower oneself and others ... in the ontological naming and affirming of ourselves we are engaged in a dynamic reaching out to the mystery of God ..." (66-7).

Several things may be noted here. Jesus Christ is missing from this discussion of naming God and of conversion. Thus, Johnson assumes that women can turn to themselves to name God, to know God and to be converted. But conversion here means self-reliance or tapping into the power of oneself with the assumption that in so doing they are reaching out to God. However, all of this ignores the problem of sin as self-will and fails to notice that Jesus calls us to repentance and belief in him alone and not to trust in ourselves as the source of our knowledge of God. Here then is a concrete instance of a failure to see the importance of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ.

Just listen for a minute to how different Torrance's view of this matter is. He does not point us to ourselves as the source of our knowledge of God. He does not think conversion means self-reliance in any way. He thinks our knowledge of God comes from the Father through the Son so that we can only really know the Father through union with Christ in faith and thus by the power of the resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit. So, allowing the crucified and risen Christ to be his starting point, Torrance says: "As fallen human beings, we are quite unable through our own free-will to escape from our self-will for our free-will is our self-will. Likewise sin has been so ingrained into our minds that we are unable to repent and

have to repent even of the kind of repentance we bring before God. But Jesus Christ laid hold of us even there in our sinful repentance and turned everything round through his holy vicarious repentance, when he bore not just upon his body but upon his human mind and soul the righteous judgments of God and resurrected our human nature in the integrity of his body, mind and soul ... the Gospel speaks of regeneration as wholly bound up with Jesus Christ himself ... our new birth, our regeneration, our conversion, are what has taken place in Jesus Christ himself, so that when we speak of our conversion or our regeneration we are referring to our sharing in the conversion or regeneration of our humanity brought about by Jesus in and through himself for our sake. In a profound and proper sense, therefore, we must speak of Jesus Christ as constituting in himself the very substance of our conversion ... without him all so-called repentance and conversion are empty ... conversion in that truly evangelical sense is a turning away from ourselves to Christ ..." (Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 86). Notice, that for Torrance, we are all exposed as sinners in light of Christ's forgiveness and our conversion refers to Christ enabling us here and now to turn away from ourselves toward him as the one in whom we are extricated from sin and placed in a right relation with God through faith. That's what it means to live by grace since grace cannot be separated from Christ, the giver of grace. The difference here is that between night and day. In Torrance's view we have true and certain knowledge of God and of salvation, but that knowledge comes from the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. It comes concretely through the very death and resurrection of Christ himself since, as the risen, ascended, and advent Lord, he alone is the active agent of our ability to know the triune God here and now.

In my latest book, my main thesis is that theology looks and is completely different when Jesus Christ himself in his uniqueness as the Word of God incarnate is allowed to be the *first* and *final* Word in theology. Torrance and Barth most certainly did that. From what I know of GWB, he did that as well. In my experience you also do that. But many of our leading contemporary theologians, including Elizabeth Johnson, do not do that. And I think it is extremely important for someone to show how and why that is so and what the implications are of such methodological failure. I do that by focusing on liberation theology, language for God, universalism, interreligious relations and nonconceptual knowledge of God,

just to name several of the subjects treated in my most recent book, *Freedom, Necessity and the Knowledge of God: In Conversation with Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance*.

TS: What positive role do you see for a genuine evangelical theology to lead the way forward beyond a simplistic and antagonistic dividing up in our contemporary society based on being "black" vs. "white" -- or any kind of race-based or contextualized theology that begins with us, not with the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ, who is coming again to complete his breaking down of the dividing walls of hostility that we perpetuate, whether we be black or white, rich or poor, or male or female?

PM: I love this question because it gets to the heart of a properly evangelical theology and to the most important point of my most recent book. In that work I argue that all theology will look different when Christian theologians allow Jesus Christ himself to be the *first* and the *final* Word in theology. If one begins theology with anyone or anything else, then idolatry and self-justification always follow with problematic results. Let me explain that a bit.

Much contemporary liberation theology begins from the assumption that the human fight against oppression and for liberation is an appropriate starting point not only for a proper view liberation (human freedom), but for proper knowledge of the triune God. A suitable evangelical theology would oppose both that starting point and the conclusions that follow. First, since all such attempts do not begin in faith by allowing Jesus Christ himself to disclose to us who we really are in ourselves and in him, the problem of sin and its solution is missed. Second, because of that it is assumed that we already have the freedom to overcome what it is that enslaves us humanly. Third, both of those assumptions then lead to the idea that we can rely on ourselves and some sort of innate freedom and knowledge of God to know the triune God and to know what it means to be in right relation with God and each other. Each of those conclusions is wrong and with disastrous results.

Let us consider an example of a theology which does not begin and end with Jesus himself. There are many to choose from. I have discussed these in my last two books, *Freedom, Necessity and the Knowledge of God* and *Divine Freedom and*

the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity. Here I will focus on Elizabeth Johnson who argues that as women have new experiences of being liberated from male domination, they experience God in new ways and should thus name God out of that experience. I have consistently opposed such thinking because I agree with Thomas F. Torrance who believes that an evangelical theology must think from a center in God and not from a center in ourselves. And he does not think we have to leave the sphere of history and human experience to do this because God himself has come to us in the incarnation to make himself known to us as the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I will return to his thought in a moment.

Here I want to explain that because Johnson presumes that women's supposed new experiences of God lead to accurate knowledge of the Christian God, she claims that there is "one strand that is fundamental to emancipatory speech about God in feminist liberation theology, namely, the experience of conversion" (*She Who Is*, 61). Thus, she asserts that "A central resource for naming toward God, the very matrix that energizes it, is the breakthrough of power occurring in women's struggle to reject the sexism of inherited constructions of female identity and risk new interpretations that affirm their own human worth. This foundational experience can be suitably described in the classic language of conversion" (*ibid.*, 61-2). From this, as already noted above in another context, it follows for Johnson that "Through women's encounter with the holy mystery of their own selves as blessed comes commensurate language about holy mystery in female metaphor and symbol, gracefully, powerfully, necessarily ... speaking about God and self-interpretation cannot be separated. To give but one example, conversion experienced not as giving up oneself but as tapping into the power of oneself simultaneously releases understanding of divine power not as dominating power-over but as the passionate ability to empower oneself and others ... in the ontological naming and affirming of ourselves we are engaged in a dynamic reaching out to the mystery of God" (*She Who Is*, 66-7).

The first thing to be noticed here is that Johnson explicitly thinks from a center in human experience and not from a center in the incarnate Word. Had she done the latter, she would have immediately realized that we are sinners and cannot escape our self-will that puts us at enmity with God and each other by

relying on our supposed “conversion” experiences. That is what is revealed in and through Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection as we hear his Word here and now through the power of the Holy Spirit. In him humanity was confronted directly by God as the one true God who was uniquely present and active in the person and work of Christ as humanity’s savior, helper, and friend. And what was the reaction of his own people? It was to hand him over to the Romans (the Gentiles) to be crucified. In those events we are all disclosed as sinners, namely, as those who reject God as he truly is for us in Christ.

The second thing to be noticed is that in her approach she ignores the problem of sin which Torrance immediately recognizes because he insists that all Christian knowledge of the triune God must begin with cognitive union with Christ and thus with faith in him. To begin with ourselves, as she does, would be to embrace some form of self-justification which illustrates Torrance’s positive point that in light of revelation, we are disclosed as in-turned, twisted and self-willed sinners in need of God’s forgiving grace. In ourselves, we are thus opposed to the only truth which can lead to true liberation, true freedom, and thus to true knowledge of God. This means we would have to acknowledge that Jesus himself and not our experience of emancipation is the only possible starting point for a properly evangelical theology. That is the case because he really is the Way, the Truth, and the Life since no one comes to the Father except through him (Jn. 14:6). So, while it is true that self-interpretation and knowledge of God cannot be separated as Johnson says, that hardly means that we can know the Christian God through our own self-interpretation and experiences of emancipation as she also maintains. It is that false assumption that leads to all the conflicts that are alive and well in contemporary theology and in political and social life. It is that false assumption that leads some theologians today to construct theological anthropologies without Christ himself and even against what he has done for us in his own life, death, resurrection and ascension, and what he himself reveals to us now in the power of his Holy Spirit and in faith.

Let me present a few salient remarks from Torrance to show just how distorted Johnson’s liberationist approach to freedom and to knowledge of God really is. She thinks conversion means that women should tap into their own power

and not give themselves up. But for Christians conversion has never meant that since we are baptized into the death of Christ in the hope of rising again through him. We are baptized out of ourselves and into Christ. Thus, to be a disciple means, as Jesus himself made clear, taking up our cross and following him—giving ourselves up to him as our savior and as the only one who can and does free us from sin, including the sin of patriarchalism. Indeed, he also is the only one who can enable us to recognize and overcome the sin of racism as well. I will return to this in a moment.

Listen to the words of Torrance once again. "As fallen human beings, we are quite unable through our own free-will to escape from our self-will for our free-will is our self-will. Likewise sin has been so ingrained into our minds that we are unable to repent and have to repent even of the kind of repentance we bring before God. But Jesus Christ laid hold of us even there in our sinful repentance and turned everything round through his holy vicarious repentance, when he bore not just upon his body but upon his human mind and soul the righteous judgments of God and resurrected our human nature in the integrity of his body, mind and soul from the grave ... the Gospel speaks of regeneration as wholly bound up with Jesus Christ himself ... our new birth, our regeneration, our conversion, are what has taken place in Jesus Christ himself, so that when we speak of our conversion or our regeneration we are referring to our sharing in the conversion or regeneration of our humanity brought about by Jesus in and through himself for our sake. In a profound and proper sense, therefore, we must speak of Jesus Christ as constituting in himself the very substance of our conversion ... without him all so-called repentance and conversion are empty ... conversion in that truly evangelical sense is a turning away from ourselves to Christ, it calls for a conversion from our in-turned notions of conversion to one grounded and sustained in Christ Jesus himself" (*The Mediation of Christ*, 85-6).

Among contemporary theologians, there is no doubt that Torrance explicitly allows Jesus Christ to be the *first* and *final* Word in his understanding of conversion and therefore in his understanding of human freedom as grounded in God's freedom for us in the incarnation. His basic point, however, is utterly opposed to the idea that we can construct a relevant theological anthropology without explicitly

relying on Christ himself and sharing in his new humanity so that we do not rely on our own free-will to know God and to know who we really are in relation to him. It is indeed through the Holy Spirit actualizing in us the reconciliation between us and God accomplished objectively in Christ, that we truly know God and live as those who have been freed from the sins of patriarchalism and racism. Put bluntly, true knowledge of God comes from God alone as the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ and thus to the Father. It does not come from us at all.

When this is not seen and understood then we are told by some that we must reconstruct the doctrine of creation in order to overcome "whiteness" and in overcoming "whiteness," which is thought to be the source of racism, we are then told that we will have a proper view of God the creator and us as his creatures. However, nothing could be further from the truth because while there is a way from Christology to a proper view of anthropology as both Torrance and Barth held, there is no way from anthropology to a proper view of God the creator or to a proper view of sin, salvation, and true freedom. Racism is an evil to be sure. But we will never recognize it as the evil it is unless we understand the meaning of sin and freedom from what is revealed in and by the crucified and risen Lord. I say this here because in a recent publication in the College Theology Society Annual Volume (2021) entitled "Recognizing the Human After Whiteness: Hermeneutics, Anthropology, and Scripture in Paul Ricoeur and Willie James Jennings" David de la Fuente simply assumes that the problem of racism today stems from "whiteness" which is equated with dominating others. However, the real problem in evidence when people try to dominate others is the problem of sin. To equate this with race would itself be a form of racism since racism refers to any attempt to define people exclusively by their race instead of by their relations with God and each other. The author sees "whiteness" as a "disease" which afflicts the Christian imagination. Yet, from a Christian standpoint, the disease that really afflicts the Christian imagination is sin, namely, the idea that we can rely on ourselves to recognize and overcome the sin of racism. The author of this article sets out to "reimagine" the human "after whiteness" and sets out to do so by weaving together insights from Ricoeur and Jennings. Only then does he turn to Scripture as a "special case" and as a narrative "that can disclose a possible world for shared human life 'after whiteness'" (4).

Noticeably absent from this analysis is any recognition of the need for Jesus Christ as the only one who can disclose to us our true human need (which is forgiveness of our sin) and the true meaning of human freedom and salvation as enabled through union with Christ himself. Scripture is not just a narrative that we use to overcome "whiteness." It is witness to Jesus himself as the Word of God enabling us to live in right relation with God and each other. In this article we are told that as "second readers" of Scripture after the "first readers" (Israel), then "this position" will open up "the biblically communicated dream of ending hostilities, something that is not only within general human capacities ... but is also theologically speaking God's intention" (8). However, in conceptualizing our Jewish neighbors as "first readers" of Scripture and Christians as "second readers" the author completely ignores the problem of sin and the need for salvation. It is not within anyone's general capacity to overcome sin and free us for love of God and neighbor. That is why the incarnation took place in the first instance so that this could be done for us from the divine and human side in Christ. Furthermore, the relation between Jews and Christians is not so easily solved just by speaking of first and second readers because the first readers themselves handed over their own Messiah to the Romans to be crucified in their imagined faithfulness to God. Moreover, the second readers only read Scripture properly when they allow Christ himself to be the *first* and *final* Word witnessed to in both the Old and New Testaments! The sad part of allowing race rather than Christ to set the agenda here is that it allows one to argue that it is through exchanging memories that people in the United States "are willing to listen to and amplify the voices naming the disfiguring effects of whiteness and the intersecting experiences of oppression" (10). When this happens, we are told that the "Western self" would then be destabilized, and this would open "up a more authentic recognition of the human other in their particularity and diversity" (10).

The problem here is that none of this recognizes that the real problem of racism is the problem of sin; it has nothing to do with "whiteness." And the only way to understand the human other in an authentic manner is from the human Jesus himself who enables human beings to live as the reconciled sinners they are in Christ here and now. That would be a truly theological solution to our human problems. Torrance and Barth understood that. It is no accident that Torrance and

Barth would never reverse anthropology and theology as is commonly done in much Catholic and Protestant theology today. Thus, for Torrance, to be a Christian means taking up one's cross and following Christ. By contrast, Willie Jennings argues that "To be a Christian is to 'read after', that is, to attune our senses to hear, and see, touch, feel and smell what others have already discovered" ("Reframing the Word: Toward an Actual Christian Doctrine of Creation," *ISJT* 21, 4, October, 2019, 405). Not exactly. I say this because they did not "discover" the truth that met them in Jesus Christ. That truth "discovered" them as the sinners they were and forgave them and reconciled them to the Father. While Christianity is indeed indissolubly united with Israel in the covenant which was fulfilled in Christ for Jew and Gentile alike, what Jennings offers is a most inadequate grasp of what it means to be a Christian since a Christian is one who takes up the cross and follows Christ himself. He is the one who frees people to be truly human in every new circumstance. So, it is not enough to say that to be a Christian is to "hear, and see, touch, feel and smell what others have already discovered."

For Jennings, unfortunately, the doctrine of creation needs to overcome "the epistemic racism of whiteness that constantly forms knowledge in a Eurocentric hierarchy of value with all non-white bodies in the secondary role of making 'contributions' to an agreed upon (white) body of knowledge" (407). Unless and until theologians from whatever region of the world they live in are willing to recognize that Jesus himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, theologians will be liable to falling prey to this racist set of ideas. To equate racism with whiteness is to miss the fact that racism stems from human sinners, whatever their race. Further, to equate "epistemic racism" with Eurocentric values with the claim that non-whites are secondary is another racist presupposition and not a Christian one. Finally, to claim that Eurocentric theology must consist in an agreed upon "white body of knowledge" is again a racist judgment that misses the fact that any genuine theology of creation must allow itself to be shaped by who God is as the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christology and therefore Jesus Christ himself determines the truth of theology and what it means to be truly human in Europe, Asia, South America, North America, Africa and anywhere else on earth.

TS: Dietrich Bonhoeffer incisively described his time at Union Theological Seminary in NY (which his friend Paul Lehmann arranged) as 'Protestantism without Reformation.' Karl Barth as a respondent to Vatican II viewed the internal reforms of the Roman Church as a call to Protestantism for a new reformation. Is it your view that both the Catholic and Protestant wings of the fractured Western Church are still in need of renewal, repentance, and reformation?

PM: Honestly, I don't know a lot about these events. I did know that Barth advised Bonhoeffer to return to Germany and I think I recall that someone said that, in light of subsequent events, he regretted that advice! I also know that Tillich taught at Union. But, again, I don't know a lot of details about any of this. Of course, Barth thought Vatican II was an important positive move for the Roman Catholic Church. But he later wondered whether some theologians such as his friend Hans Küng might have mistakenly moved in the direction of the liberal Protestant position that Barth himself once espoused and then rejected. Barth also was a bit dismayed by the fact that in the document on Revelation the Council's statements were not entirely consistent so that some thought they could set up natural law as a source of our knowledge of God alongside revelation in its identity with Christ. I discuss this in my new book, *Freedom, Necessity and the Knowledge of God: In Conversation with Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance*, Chapter Two, "Barth and Roman Catholic Theology."

TS: Here's a pointed question (with preliminary commentary): How did TFT help you become "evangelical" and "catholic" in a way that transcended both "Evangelicalism" and "Catholicism" in their various contexts? Do you accept "evangelical catholic" as a way to describe your own pilgrimage — or is it perhaps more complex?

PM: I don't know if you are aware of this, but I have a letter from T. F. Torrance in which he said he really liked the fact that I was an evangelical Catholic. I took that as a compliment because if Catholic theology is to be truly catholic *and* theological it must be grounded in the Gospel! But that means that magisterial statements, however important they may be, and they are important, cannot assume any sort of normative role in relation to revelation itself as that meets us in Jesus Christ as attested in the Bible! So, to be evangelical and a catholic to me

means to be faithful to Christ himself as that faith is enabled by the Holy Spirit. That would require a reconceptualization of truth in the sense that Torrance explained in his monumental piece "Truth and Authority: Theses on Truth," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 39 (3) (1972), 215-242. He maintained that our thinking must be in line with the truth of being as it is grounded in God and therefore in our encounter with God in Christ. However, he rightly claimed that that could not happen if truth were equated with magisterial statements about it or with our subjective experiences in such a way that one might suggest that we could have some sort of non-conceptual knowledge of God in the form of symbolic descriptions of our religious experiences. Torrance rejected such thinking because it always grounded truth in us instead of in Christ himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In my new book, *Freedom, Necessity and the Knowledge of God*, I contrast Torrance's thinking with the views of Karl Rahner to demonstrate the problematic implications of Rahner's embrace of non-conceptual knowledge of God (Chapter Four). Non-conceptual knowledge of God is a culprit in contemporary theology because it leads many to think that true knowledge of God in some sense comes *from* us instead of only *to* us through the power of the Holy Spirit uniting us conceptually and ontologically to Christ himself and thus to God the Father.