

T. F. TORRANCE'S REALISTIC
SOTERIOLOGICAL OBJECTIVISM AND
THE ELIMINATION OF DUALISMS:
UNION WITH CHRIST IN CURRENT PERSPECTIVE

by James J. Cassidy

Introduction

ON DECEMBER 2, 2007 the theological world lost one of its most articulate thinkers and prolific writers in recent memory. Born in August of 1913 Thomas F. Torrance was a man constantly between places. He was a Scotsman, but was born in China to Scottish Presbyterian missionaries.¹ He studied German in Marburg, then under Karl Barth in Basel for two semesters², and then taught in the United States at Auburn Theological Seminary (later turning down positions at McCormack Theological Seminary and Princeton University).³ He was a theologian, but knew his science so well that he had become *the* authority on the relation between science and theology. He was called to replace Karl Barth at the University of Basel, but ended up teaching back in Scotland. He was an academic and served 27 years at New College, but was also a churchman who served many years in the pastorate. He was a Presbyterian minister, but was consecrated a Protopresbyter in the Patriarchate of Alexandria.⁴ He was active in writing during his teaching career, but his greatest work came after his retirement when he penned *The Christian Doctrine of God*.

It is perhaps ironic, in light of his life and dual (evenly multiple) residences, callings, and interests, that he is so well known for his disdain of dualisms⁵. In his search for a "rigorous scientific theology"⁶ he found a unified theory of knowledge in Christology. Epistemologically or soteriologically, the hypostatic union of God and man in the incarnation

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999) 3-18; Elmer M. Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001) 36.

² McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance*, 19ff.

³ *Ibid.*, 47ff. Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 40-41.

⁴ McGrath, *Thomas F. Torrance*, 102.

⁵ Kye Won Lee, *Living in Union with Christ: The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003) 11ff. Here Lee notes, "Torrance regards the post-Augustinian period until Einstein as the era of imprisonment in dualism." See also Alan G. Marley, *T. F. Torrance: The Rejection of Dualism* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1992).

⁶ Elmer M. Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 21.

through the Spirit is our union with Christ—thus the source of both our knowledge in theology and of our salvation. Thus, all that Christ did in his life, death, and resurrection he did on our behalf. All of the traditional *ordo salutis* is encapsulated objectively in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ lives for man vicariously, such that all he is and does he is and does for us. If we want to know where our justification is, we find it in Christ. If we want to know where our faith is, we look to Christ who believed for us. Christ is objectively our all and all.

However, what is the relation between Christ's objective work *pro nobis*, and his subjective work *in nobis*? In other words, what—if anything—happens to the believer in his life-history? How is the objective work of Christ appropriated or applied to the believer today? Interestingly, there is not complete agreement among the current interpreters of Torrance's theology. In this essay we will compare and contrast three Torrance scholars and how they view the Scottish theologian's doctrine of union with Christ. We will then compare and contrast these views with Torrance's writings themselves and draw some implications for the current discussion. Then, we will compare Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ with Reformed exegetical theology, specifically with reference to Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2:1-10. And lastly, we will compare Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ with the Reformed tradition—particularly John Calvin. From all this we will evaluate Torrance's doctrine and consider how it may or may not be helpful for a future constructive soteriology.

1. Three Current Torrance Interpreters

1.1. Preliminary Considerations

The doctrine of union with Christ is not exactly at the front and center of theological studies produced by Barthians. Even a cursory search for studies explicitly written on Barth's doctrine of union with Christ turns up virtually nothing.⁷ However, there are more studies readily available on T. F. Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ. Here we will consider three of them: Colyer, Lee, and Rankin.

⁷ The few exceptions approach the doctrine of union with Christ in Barth's theology in an indirect way. See, for instance, A. T. B. McGowan, "Justification and the *ordo salutis*," and Bruce L. McCormack, "*Justitia aliena*: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness," both in ed. Bruce McCormack, *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) 147-163 and 167-196, respectively; George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 148-85. (This chapter is also found in an abbreviated form as "The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in ed. John Webster, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) 177-94; *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 1991) 218-224; "A Tale of Two Simultaneities: Justification and Sanctification in Calvin and Barth," in eds. John C. McDowell and Mike Higton, *Conversing with Barth* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004).

1.2 Elmer M. Colyer

Colyer is arguably the leading authority on the theology of T. F. Torrance. In his survey of Torrance's theology, he covers the full scope of the New College Professor's thinking. Hence, there is no full orbbed or extended treatment of Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ, *per se*. However, there is enough in Colyer's work to be helpful in attaining a comprehension of the issues involved. Especially because Colyer does treat at length Torrance's doctrine of the incarnation; for it is in the context of Torrance's incarnational theology that we do see the topic of union with Christ surface.

Discussion about union with Christ first comes in Colyer's treatment of Torrance's view of the hypostatic union. Here he discusses the idea of "incarnational redemption."⁸ For Torrance the atonement is not something which occurs on the cross—primarily. Rather, the atonement takes place in the incarnation. In the incarnation the eternal Son of God takes to himself our sinful, fallen flesh.⁹ Yet, the Son does not sin himself, nor does he become corrupt by our sin and guilt. So it is, in the hypostatic union, that the redemption of our flesh occurs—for a real, reconciling union between man and Christ is effected. Colyer lays out the formulation this way:

... the hypostatic union is *a reconciling union* in which the Son of God condemned sin in our sinful humanity and overcame the estrangement, sin, guilt and death entrenched in our humanity via a transforming relation between the divine and the human natures within the incarnate reality of Jesus Christ. *The incarnation is inherently redemptive*, and redemption is intrinsically incarnational.¹⁰

In this way, the very idea of reconciliation and union between God and man is radically restructured from the traditional conception. As will be mapped out below, the traditional concept of reconciliation and union has a two-fold aspect: objective and subjective. What Christ does *extra nos* is God's objective work of redemption; thus, it is accomplished once and for all. But—according to the traditional view—that work needs to be applied to his people, *in nobis*. Through a subjective work, the Holy Spirit applies Christ's objective accomplishments to the believer. This is a work that takes place in his life-history whereby his spiritual condition transitions from a state of wrath to a state grace and forgiveness. However, if Colyer is accurate, for Torrance the idea of union and reconciliation between God and man is a wholly objective scenario in which the idea of a subjective application in the life-history of the believer is completely bypassed. Or, so it seems.

This train of thought continues in Colyer as he develops Torrance's theology of the hypostatic union. Following on the theme just developed, Colyer writes:

⁸ Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 84.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁰ *Idem.* The emphasis is mine.

Torrance argues that redemption takes place through Jesus Christ's resurrection and ascension and not just Christ's death on the cross. Incarnational redemption involves not only forgiveness and freedom from bondage, but also new life in union with God. The end goal of the atonement is more than the restoration of relations between God and humanity, for it includes 'union with God in and through Jesus Christ in whom our human nature is not only saved, healed and renewed but lifted up to participate in the very light, life and love of the Holy Trinity.'¹¹

Several points from this passage are in order. First, notice that the language concerns "union with God" at this point, and not more specifically "union with Christ." In other words, the incarnation unites all men to God himself. By virtue of the divine and human hypostasis, God and man are brought into union and communion with each other. Second, notice the extent of that union. It consists in the lifting up of humanity to participate in the very life of the Trinity. Here hints are given of Torrance's doctrine of *theosis*, which will be further developed below. And third, the incarnation itself effects redemption. It effects a redemption which is not just about forgiveness of sins but about a real union with the very being of God. Yet, all this takes place outside of us, *extra nos*. It happens irrespective of the faith response or the work of the Holy Spirit *in nobis* in our real life-history.

This being said, there is a marked shift in Colyer's synopsis of Torrance's soteriology throughout the course of his work. Whereas in the earlier sections of his volume the emphasis is overwhelmingly in the direction of the objective work of redemption in which we are brought into union with Christ and God through the incarnation, in the later sections emphasis is given to the subjective work of the Spirit "in us." As noted above, earlier on Colyer speaks about the incarnation effecting union with God. However, he makes no specific mention of "union with Christ." The concept of union with Christ seems reserved for the sections dealing with the work of the Holy Spirit. For instance, Colyer can say:

This also means that the image of God restored through the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ, and mediated to us in the Spirit who unites us in Christ, is closely related to Torrance's understanding of *theosis*.¹²

Notice here—contrary to what Colyer said earlier—there is now a dualism introduced into Torrance's soteriology. Whereas before it appeared as if all of soteriology—including union with Christ—is wrapped up in the once and for all event of the incarnation, here two distinct steps in salvation are introduced. On the one hand there is the restoration of the image of God "through the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ" in the incarnation; and then there is the mediation of the Spirit who subsequently "unites us in Christ" on the other. Colyer goes on to state:

Thus *theosis/theopoiesis* is closely related to this relational *imago Dei*, for in Torrance's trinitarian perspective, the Spirit unites us to Christ and

¹¹ Ibid., 93.

¹² Ibid., 178.

through Christ with the Father, and therefore brings our creaturely relations to their true end and fulfillment in union and communion with the triune God.¹³

Note again the “two step” process. The Holy Spirit unites us to Christ, but Christ unites us to the triune God by virtue of the incarnational union of the divine and human in the God-man, Jesus Christ.

This course of thought continues in Colyer's chapter on the Holy Spirit. Under a subsection entitled “The coming of the Holy Spirit mediates Jesus Christ to us” he expressly states that it is the Spirit that unites us to Christ.¹⁴ He then explicates this idea by saying:

We should not think of the Holy Spirit, Torrance argues, as a substitute for Christ, but rather as coming in Christ's name and uniting the church with the risen Christ in Christ's identification with us. The Spirit so unites us with Christ that in the Spirit's coming on the church Christ himself comes again to dwell in the church uniting the church with himself as his body.¹⁵

The work of the Holy Spirit described here is similar to that found in traditional doctrines of union with Christ. It appears as if this is a subjective work of the Holy Spirit in the life-history of the believer subsequent to the act of incarnation. Colyer makes his point even more explicit when he writes:

Here Torrance sees a twofold activity of the Holy Spirit ... that parallels and answers the twofold work of Christ. The Spirit comes forth from God the Father, receives from the Son, acts from the side of God and unites Christ to us, actualizing Christ's revealing and reconciling activity within us.¹⁶

The work of the Holy Spirit is described as a work in which he unites the believer to Christ. Thus the Spirit “actualizes Christ's revealing and reconciling activity *within us*.” A distinction is made between Christ's objective reconciling activity (i.e., the incarnation) on the one hand, and the Holy Spirit's subjective “actualizing” of that activity “within us” on the other. If any doubt about a re-introduction of an objective/subjective dualism remains, Colyer settles the matter when he says:

In places Torrance speaks of the Spirit as Christ's *Alter Ego* or *Alter Advocatus* who seals our adoption as children of God in Christ and so unites us to Christ that we come to share by grace in Christ's own filial relationship with the Father realized vicariously within Christ's earthly human life on our behalf ... and sheds the love of God in Christ abroad in our hearts.¹⁷

¹³ Ibid., 179.

¹⁴ Ibid., 224.

¹⁵ Ibid., 224-5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 225.

¹⁷ Ibid., 230.

The Holy Spirit's work is described as an act of sealing to us what Christ has already accomplished. And in so doing the Holy Spirit "sheds the love of God in Christ abroad *in our hearts*." This, again, is indicative of a subjective aspect of salvation and thus a re-introduction of an *ordo salutis* in Torrance's thought. And with the *ordo salutis* comes, inevitably, what Torrance would consider to be a soteriological dualism.

To summarize, Colyer appears to begin his treatment of Torrance in a strong and consistent way emphasizing his soteriological objectivism and his disdain for dualisms. However, Colyer seems to lose his bearings and falls back into an objective/subjective duality. This seems to miss the radical nature of Torrance's soteriology which is wholly objective. Salvation is an objective once and for all activity of God in Christ, particularly in the act of incarnation. For Torrance, in the hypostatic union redemption is so *realistically* accomplished that there is no need to speak about redemption applied. However, Colyer seems to lose sight of this all important aspect to Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ understood incarnationally. Perhaps there is a more consist read among some of Torrance's other interpreters.

1.3. *Kye Won Lee*

Lee's work makes clear the central place of the incarnation in the theology of T. F. Torrance. So central is the incarnation in his thinking that the doctrine of union with Christ may be described in incarnational terms. In the God-man, Jesus Christ, God and man are so united to each other that the bond may be categorized as ontological, through and through. Lee explains:

This incarnational union of Christ with us is an indissoluble ontological union ... This ontological union established for us in the whole historical Jesus Christ is continuously maintained and effected in our space-time through the Spirit of Christ.¹⁸

In this way, then, the idea of salvation and grace is completely objectivized. To have grace, to be saved, is to be united to Christ through the hypostatic union. Because we are man, and because Christ took to himself true humanity (in its fallen state)¹⁹, and because Christ is of one substance with the father (i.e., homoousion), we become one with the Father. All this, of course, takes place outside of us and apart from us. Lee summarizes:

Torrance's doctrine of grace is characterized by its objectivity. He restores the importance of the covenant of grace, and personal and dialogical theology without falling into anthropocentric and subjective personalism. He applies the *homoousion* and the hypostatic union to the doctrine of grace. He maintains the personal nature and mode of God's grace, and our participation in the new humanity of Christ.²⁰

¹⁸ Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, 121.

¹⁹ "Our fallen humanity has been assumed, cleansed, healed" *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

But that is not all. According to Lee, Torrance so objectivizes salvation that even those aspects of the so-called *ordo salutis* traditionally reserved for a subjective appropriation by the Holy Spirit *in nobis* are accomplished and applied in Christ *extra nos*. In this way, then, "Torrance does not view our regeneration ... as what happens in our heart."²¹ So, we may ask, if regeneration does not happen in our hearts, then where and when does it happen? Lee explains that regeneration occurs "in and with Christ's birth and resurrection."²² In other words, when Christ is born and then later resurrected from the dead, those events are his generation and regeneration—respectively. And those acts are performed "in the flesh," that is in our flesh. Thus, our humanity (and, in fact, humanity as such) is born and born again in the birth and rebirth of Jesus Christ. There is so further work to be done by the Holy Spirit in us, for our birth and rebirth is already accomplished once and for all in Jesus Christ.

At first glance one might be led to believe that Lee sees no need for a subjective appropriation of Christ's objective work for us in Torrance's theology. However, that would be to misread Lee. The strong emphasis on the objective which we have thus highlighted, becomes confused in Lee's work by another emphasis on the subjective. For Lee, Torrance speaks about union *in* Christ in contrast to union *with* Christ. All of humanity is united *in* Christ by virtue of the incarnation. However, only some humans are united *with* Christ through the Holy Spirit working in them subjectively. Lee explains:

Union *in* [emphasis his] Christ, for Torrance, is viewed as a 'natural law' in our faith and theology. This ontological and personal logic intrinsic in Jesus is noetically and sacramentally reflected in us through union *with* [emphasis mine] Christ. What is cardinal to Torrance's doctrine of the Mediator is the once-for-all fulfillment of the objective-ontological reality and the subjective-eschatological realization of it in and through the obedient humanity of Christ. The objective and subjective realization of God's revelation and reconciliation was fulfilled in the humanity of Christ. This objectively-subjectively actualized reality is subjectively realized in us through union with Christ by the Holy Spirit.²³

The all important distinction that must be pointed up is that between "actualized" and "realized." What Lee is saying is that in the incarnation, union is *actualized* between God and man by virtue of the hypostatic union. However, that union is only *realized* in the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, it would seem appropriate to speak about a subjective aspect of soteriology. Again, Lee states:

Torrance holds to a theology of objectivity in or to maintain the basic equilibrium of theology which has been biased by subjectivism. However, it is not a pure objectivity which has nothing to do with us in its detach-

²¹ Ibid., 210.

²² Idem.

²³ Ibid., 301.

ment from us, but an objectivity which itself enables the integrity of subjectivity.²⁴

We can greatly appreciate Lee's theological instincts at this point. He apparently wants to avoid turning Christ and the incarnation into an abstraction. However, and this is where Lee's study becomes extremely frustrating, how does this square with the previous comments he has made about Torrance's formulations which speaks about the *ordo salutis* in objective and incarnational terms?

It seems as if there is a shift in Lee's study. At the beginning of the work, front and center is the idea of the incarnation as explaining the architectonic principle for all of Torrance's theology. All of salvation, reconciliation, and atonement are encapsulated within the doctrine of incarnation. The hypostatic union is the union of humanity with God in Christ. All of mankind are united to Christ by virtue of his assumption of fallen humanity.

The incarnational union of Christ with our sinful flesh initiated in his birth and Baptism is to provide through his substitutionary atonement a way for our union with Christ as his Body.²⁵

In this way all of our redemption is accomplished in our union with Christ in his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. Not only is regeneration something that does not happen in us, but neither is justification. "Justification refers to our sacramental union with Christ. It is already given to us."²⁶ Yet, we should not mistake Lee's language here. When he says that Justification is "sacramental" and "given to us," he does not mean it is subjectively appropriated in the real life-history of the believer. That is because "Torrance rejects the notion of justification as a temporal process within sinful history."²⁷ The idea of subjective application of Christ's benefits could not be further from his mind being that he "rejects the notion of *ordo salutis* in which justification and sanctification are viewed as two different stages."²⁸ Yet, towards the end of the study, Lee articulates Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ as if there is a strong subjective aspect in which Christ's incarnational union with man must be applied and become an existential union in us.

It is difficult to see, given these ideas of the incarnation and the life-history of Christ providing the objective reality of humanity's union with God, how Lee can make room for a subjective realization in the life of the believer. This tension in Lee's work may be due to the dialectical nature of Torrance's theology. Or, it may be that he is reading his own theological instincts into Torrance and making a theological provision which is not actually there in Torrance's writings themselves. Given the late Edinburgh professor's disdain for dualism of any sort, we suspect that the

²⁴ Ibid., 297.

²⁵ Ibid., 188.

²⁶ Ibid., 214.

²⁷ Idem.

²⁸ Idem.

latter is the case. Lee, therefore, does not offer us any more of a consistent read than did Colyer.

1.4. *W. Duncan Rankin*

If Lee provides the strongest statements on a subjective aspect of union with Christ in Torrance, and Colyer provides similar but weaker statements, then Rankin's study stands out from the others as being meticulously consist *against* any subjective idea of union in Torrancean soteriology.²⁹ For instance, Rankin begins his study with a survey of Torrance's introduction to his work on the Reformed catechisms³⁰ in which he summarizes:

In the pages that follow, Torrance distances himself from Crag's division between 'carnal union' and 'spiritual union,' instead *uniting the two by subsuming the latter under the former*. Thus, in his introduction, Torrance utilizes the sixteenth-century Scot's peculiar terminology but re-constructs its doctrinal content.³¹

What Rankin has in view is Torrance's appropriation of John Craig's language of "carnal union" in his 1581 catechism. In the original context, Craig makes a distinction between "carnal union" and "spiritual union" with Christ. The former is a clear reference to the incarnation. There is a sense in which man and Christ have an external, physical union by virtue of Christ and humanity sharing in the same nature. However, Craig makes mention that without "spiritual union" the "carnal union" avails nothing.³² In other words, without the subjective application of Christ's objective work, that work means nothing to man in terms of his redemption. However, Rankin argues, Torrance obliterates the clear distinction between objective and subjective by collapsing the latter into the former. All of the doctrine of union with Christ must be understood in exclusively incarnational terms.

Now, to be sure, Rankin does recognize that Torrance has a place for the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.³³ Yet—and this is all important—the objective and subjective sides of union with Christ are *both* actualized in the incarnation. Union is objectively offered from the *divine* side, and it is subjectively received and appropriated by the Holy Spirit on the *human* side—all happening once and for all in the *divine-human*, Jesus Christ. Rankin explains:

This universal incarnational union Torrance identifies with Scottish Reformer John Craig's terminology of 'carnal union,' describing more his own broader development of union with Christ—which includes not only

²⁹ W. Duncan Rankin, "Carnal Union with Christ in the Theology of T. F. Torrance" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1997).

³⁰ T. F. Torrance, *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: J. Clarke, 1959).

³¹ Rankin, "Carnal Union with Christ," 2-3. The emphasis is mine.

³² *The School of Faith*, 113.

³³ See, for instance, "Carnal Union with Christ," 127.

the hypostatic union but also spiritual union—than Craig's double union, to which he has objected previously.³⁴

In other words—standing against the tradition of Reformed theology to make a distinction between the hypostatic union on the one hand and the Spirit-wrought union of the believer with Jesus Christ on the other—Torrance sees incarnational/carnal union as including *both* the union of the two natures of Christ *and* the spiritual union man has with Christ. They are one and the same event. Spiritual and thus soteric union with Christ is given and received in the person and work of Jesus. It is analogous to Torrance's (and thus Barth's before him) doctrine of revelation or reconciliation. The revelation of God does not await us individual men to receive it by our weak and imperfect faith, but rather God's revelation is given by God and received by man in the God-man, Jesus Christ.

This is a keen insight rendered by Rankin; many of Torrance's current interpreters miss it completely. It is only by taking this approach to the late Scottish professor's soteriology that we may preserve his commitment against dualisms. Again, Rankin is helpful in distilling this highly original doctrine of union with Christ when he writes:

On the ground of our ontological union, carnal union connection to Christ as man established in his incarnation, which Torrance terms 'objective union,' the Holy Spirit makes the incarnational union a subjective reality in our daily experience. Instead of Craig's two separate unions, Torrance see one union with Christ, including objective and subjective aspects. This, Torrance see in the doctrine of union with Christ a universal union with all men via the incarnation, whereby they are in Christ. *He is persuaded that incarnational union with Christ includes the actual content of spiritual union, objectively involving all humankind.* This understanding produces no dogmatic division between carnal and spiritual union with Christ in Torrance's thought: *there is only one union with Christ.*³⁵

Notice that incarnational union—or the hypostatic union of the two natures of God and humanity—includes not just an objective uniting of man to Christ ontologically speaking, but also a spiritual union as well. That is to say, a union that is accomplished by the Holy Spirit at the incarnation in which union with Christ is both given and received. In Christ, and by virtue of the hypostatic union, all of humanity has been united to Him both carnally and spiritually. In fact, such a distinction (i.e., that between carnal and spiritual union) is not viable on Torrance's view, according to Rankin. This is because “in Torrance's thought: there is only one union with Christ.”

Thus, the who idea of the operation of the Holy Spirit becomes Christologically reoriented. The Holy Spirit, in uniting man to Christ, is an event that has already occurred. Rankin highlights the fact that Torrance sees the fulfillment of Joel 2:28 taking place already in the incarnation. Again, with a keen eye, Rankin quotes the words of Torrance himself:

³⁴ “Carnal Union with Christ,” 126-7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 127. The emphasis is mine.

How wide is the range of 'the carnal union' which Christ has effected between Himself as the Incarnate Son and human flesh? Does this include all men, or does it refer to only the elect? This is of fundamental importance for the doctrine of the Spirit. If Christ's incarnational union with us involves all men, then we must give a proper interpretation to the pouring out of the Spirit upon "all flesh," but if Christ's incarnational union only involves those who believe in Him ... then the doctrine of the Spirit's work must be changed accordingly ... The 'carnal union' effected by Christ between Himself and all men supplies, as it were, the field of the Spirit's activity, so that in a profound sense we have to take seriously the fact that the Spirit was poured out on 'all flesh' and operates on 'all flesh.'³⁶

For our purposes here, we will put aside Torrance's exegesis of Joel 2 and Acts 2 (surely an untenable interpretation). What is important to highlight from this passage is how Torrance sees the relation between carnal union and the work of the Holy Spirit. After all, for Torrance, this is what it means to say that Christ was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit who united God and man in the incarnation. Therefore, it is the Holy Spirit who is given and received in the hypostatic union of God and man. Union with Christ does not consist of "the elect" who will believe on Jesus Christ in a time subsequent to the incarnation, but union occurs by the Holy Spirit *in* the incarnation.

To summarize, Rankin's read of Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ stands out against the other interpretations. His view is altogether original and differs markedly from those of Lee and Colyer. The latter two scholars have a relatively reserved read of Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ which still allows for a traditional formulation in which the Holy Spirit existentially unites the believer with Christ. However, Rankin's read is radical. And it is radical exactly because Torrance's proposal is that radical. Lee and Colyer tend to somewhat "tame" Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ. Rankin's read stands out from the rest because he presents us with an untamed Torrance.

2. Torrance on Union with Christ

2.1. *Preliminary Considerations*

At this point, we are now in a better position to evaluate these three interpretations against the writings of Torrance himself. It has already been intimated that of the three, Rankin offers us the most faithful and consistent read of Torrance on union with Christ. It will be our task in this section to prove this from a close reading of several of Torrance's writings. But first, we need to set the context.

2.2. *Setting the Context*

Torrance's career as a theologian has been driven by a passion for Barth's vision of a theology which is Christologically centered and objec-

³⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 137.

tively conceived. Torrance seeks to develop a rigorous “scientific” theology on the basis of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ³⁷. Part and parcel of this program is a thoroughgoing objective epistemology. That is to say, all Christian doctrine must be meticulously expounded from the starting point of revelation³⁸. And revelation, for Torrance (and for Barth before him) is Jesus Christ³⁹. So, when we begin with Christology, that is *this* Christology, the Christology of God’s act of revelation in the incarnation, we avoid all speculation in theology. All theology then becomes concrete and actualized. From the doctrine of the Trinity, to the doctrine of creation, to the doctrine of reconciliation, all doctrine must be drawn out of and flow from Jesus Christ as very God and very man.

2.3. *Monism over Dualism?*

Therefore, it is in light of the incarnation that Torrance understands the doctrine of union with Christ. For Torrance, incarnation, revelation, and reconciliation happen all at once and the same time.⁴⁰ In the incarnation we have God who takes to himself not just a man, but humanity itself. The eternal Word becomes humanity without ceasing to be divine. Here God’s Word—the Word Himself—is communicated to man—to humanity—such that in the incarnation God’s Word is revealed and received. God’s revelation is not some aimless speaking which floats out there waiting to be received. It is received by man in the God-Man Jesus Christ. Torrance states it this way:

Within the dialogue of the divine-human life of Jesus, as the self-giving of God to man and the obedience of the Son to the Father, Revelation is both given and received, and as such is essentially historical and personal in nature.⁴¹

And so it is in this act or Christ-event (and in this event alone) that God and humanity are brought together: they are reconciled. Reconciliation is not something that depends on us. It is not contingent upon our accepting it (though, for Torrance, the imperative to accept it is there nonetheless). It is effected once and for all in the incarnation. This is biblical union. This is what it means to be united with God in Christ.⁴²

³⁷ See Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 21.

³⁸ Here Torrance speaks of Jesus Christ as the *arche*, the origin and starting point of theology. See his *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) 7.

³⁹ In fact, Torrance can say that Jesus Christ is the text of the New Testament. See his *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992) 78. The biblical text, when speaking about revelation, gets all but left out. Torrance writes elsewhere, “We cannot think and speak of God truly apart from his Word and Act in the incarnation, and that means, apart from Jesus Christ. Otherwise expressed, Jesus Christ is the one place given to us within space and time where we may know God the Father.” *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being in Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 17-18. Torrance seems to be saying that revelation takes place exclusively in the incarnation and no where else, including in the Bible.

⁴⁰ This is what he calls the “objectivity of God.” See Kye Won Lee, *Living in Union with Christ: The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003) 77.

⁴¹ T. F. Torrance, *The School of Faith*, lxvi.

⁴² Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, 99. Lee calls this “theological realism” in which “... union

But what of the Holy Spirit's work in us? Is there not a subjective side to soteriology in which the Holy Spirit brings us into communion with God? Torrance does speak about the Holy Spirit bringing us into communion with God, but this is not by virtue of a subjective work in us. This is what he calls "objective inwardness"⁴³ The Holy Spirit ever remains objective to us, never in our possession. So the "inwardness" of the Holy Spirit entails the inner-trinitarian relations between the persons of the Godhead.

Nevertheless, Torrance sees the role of true union taking place in revelation and reconciliation. Here the Holy Spirit is the one who united man with God in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Lee explains Torrance's view this way:

... it is through the one Spirit that the Word was enfleshed in his hypostatic union with our human nature, and that we are also united with Christ ... It is through the Spirit that God's *intima locutio* is related both to the *creatio ex nihilo* and to our knowledge of God.⁴⁴

The Holy Spirit is instrumental in the incarnation, thus communicating the knowledge of God to humanity. So, in this way he can maintain the traditional Reformed language of the Holy Spirit as the one who unites God's people to himself in Christ, and that the Holy Spirit communicates all the benefits of Christ to them. Colyer explains it this way:

Torrance argues that when we receive the Spirit, it is not a receiving different from or independent of Christ's vicarious reception of the Spirit, but rather a sharing in that reception. Moreover, this means that our reception of the Holy Spirit takes place only through union with Christ and through Christ with God the Father.⁴⁵

In connection with this we are to understand the receiving of the Holy Spirit in a vicarious manner. When Jesus received the Spirit he did so "for us." The idea of receiving the Spirit remains objective to us as it is accomplished already by Christ:

Our receiving of the Spirit is objectively grounded in and derives from Christ who as the incarnate Son was anointed by the Spirit in his humanity and endowed with the Spirit without measure, not for his own sake ... but for our sakes, and who then mediates the Spirit to us through himself ... Our receiving of the Spirit, therefore, is not independent of or different from the vicarious receiving of the Spirit by Christ himself but is a sharing in it.⁴⁶

with Christ should be understood in terms of Christ's ontological union with us in his incarnation." This is what Torrance elsewhere calls "the logic of grace," *Theological Science* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 216.

⁴³ *The Trinitarian Faith*, 208 ff. See Colyer's helpful explanation, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 218ff.

⁴⁴ Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, 93.

⁴⁵ Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 223.

⁴⁶ *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 148.

This role of faith and justification are seen in the same objective way. We are not justified by our faith, but by Jesus' faith "for us." Because man and God are united in the incarnation, what Jesus does we do as well in him.

It is illuminating to recognize that subjective justification as well as objective justification, has already taken place in Jesus Christ ... for what He was and did in His human nature was not for His own sake, but for our sakes ... Through union with Him, we share in His faith, in His obedience, in His trust and in His appropriation of the Father's blessing; we share in His justification before God. Therefore, when we are justified by faith, this does not mean that it is our faith that justifies us, far from it – it is the faith of Christ alone that justifies us.⁴⁷

Lee explains that Christ's vicarious life, his life lived "for us" all but precludes our human response.⁴⁸ The response—man's response—is there already in the work of Jesus Christ:

The way of God's saving grace is that our true and faithful response was provided and fulfilled in the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ... Torrance argues that in the incarnation we have the Word of God which was once and for all realized not only 'objectively' but also 'subjectively' in the humanity of Christ⁴⁹

This seems to leave place neither for a subjective appropriation of the benefits of Christ, nor for our response to the Gospel.

2.4. *Homoousion, Perichoresis, and Hypostatic Union*

The doctrine of *homoousion* may properly be described as the epistemological linchpin of Christian theology.⁵⁰ This is because the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit are all of the same substance living in perichoretic relationship. Torrance calls this an "onto-relation." An onto-relation is a relation in which persons are determined by their natural and inherent relationship to others. The Son is the Son precisely because he is of the Father, and the Father is who he is by virtue of his relation with the Son.⁵¹ So, in the hypostatic union of the incarnation—in which God is revealed to human flesh—we find not only the revelation of the

⁴⁷ "Justification: Its Radical Nature and Place in Reformed Doctrine and Life," *SJT* 13 (1960): 232-36. See also, *The Mediation of Christ*, 82-3 where he states: "We must think of Jesus as stepping into the relation between the faithfulness of God and the actual unfaithfulness of human beings, actualizing the faithfulness of God and restoring the faithfulness of human beings by grounding it in the incarnate medium of his own faithfulness so that it answers perfectly to divine faithfulness He does that as Mediator between God and man, yet precisely *as man* united to us and taking our place at every point where we human beings act as human beings and are called to have faith in the Father, to believe in him and trust him. ... we must think of Jesus Christ as believing, trusting and having faith in God the Father on our behalf and in our place." The emphasis is his.

⁴⁸ Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, 165.

⁴⁹ Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, 159ff.

⁵⁰ Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, 90. Compare with Torrance's formulation, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 95.

⁵¹ *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 157.

Son, but the Trinity itself. Thus, we may not seek knowledge of God in any place we please. God is known as triune in Jesus Christ alone. God reveals his whole self in the incarnation:

What God is toward us in the revealing and saving acts of Jesus Christ he is eternally and immanently in himself, and what God is in himself eternally and immanently as Father and Son he actually is toward us in the revealing and saving acts of Jesus Christ.⁵²

Here Torrance's realistic epistemology and ontology comes to its clearest integration. God is known objectively, because he has made himself to be object to us in revelation.

Also, *homoousion* allows Torrance to make the ontological relation between God's being and his act identical. He states:

... that was the evangelical significance of the *homoousion* formulated at the Council of Nicea. Unless there is a relation of oneness in being and act between Jesus Christ and the eternal God, then the bottom falls out of the Gospel.⁵³

This brings together the ontological and economic Trinity such that who God communicates himself as in Jesus Christ *is* God himself in his being.⁵⁴ Jesus Christ is God actually giving himself. It is both a self-giving and a self-communication. There is no gap, not dualism, between God and man in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God and God is Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ Therefore we find knowledge of God nowhere else than in his revelation, in Jesus Christ. It is here, and here alone that man's knowledge and the knowledge of God are united. And this is so because as God reveals himself as triune economically, so he is in himself ontologically. "Everything hinges, then, upon the ontological and dynamic oneness between the economic Trinity and the ontological Trinity"⁵⁶

All this, of course, should sound very familiar to anyone with Barthian ears to hear. The Swiss theologian himself continually identified God's act with his being.⁵⁷ It is this "actualistic" ontology which forms

⁵² *The Mediation of Christ*, 112.

⁵³ *The Mediation of Christ*, 124; see also, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 30. At this point, it ought to be highlighted the fundamental flaw in Torrance's formulation. For instance, Nicea does not identify the substance of Jesus Christ, in his divine-human hypostasis, with God. Rather, it identifies the substance of Jesus Christ's divine nature as the eternal Son with that of the Father and the Spirit. The divine nature, the person of the eternal *Logos*, is of the same substance as of the Father and the Spirit, not the divine and human person of the hypostasis. Secondly, Nicea is making an assertion about being, not act. Torrance wants to here identify the being and act of Jesus Christ in his divine-human person with the being of the entire Trinity.

This way of stating things is extremely problematic; and for at least two reasons. First, it makes both natures of Christ of one nature with God. It leads to a kind of *theosis*, or divinizing of the creature. Second, it runs uncomfortably close to the Eutychian heresy in which it was said that Jesus Christ was only one nature. For Torrance Jesus Christ, in both his human and divine nature, is of the divine *ousia*.

⁵⁴ Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, 141.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵⁶ *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 133.

⁵⁷ For instance, Barth says, "... the Son who has come to us or the Word that has been

Barth's metaphysical basis for his doctrine of union with Christ. Yet, Torrance—and Barth before him—does not seem to anticipate the potential dangers of making such an identity between the economic and ontological Trinity. For instance, the Reformers were clear by their expression *finitum non capax infiniti* that such an identification is impossible. If there is no ontological Trinity that stands *ad extra* (i.e., independently and apart from his works in history) then history gets swallowed up in divinity. This then would lead easily to a communication of attributes; which the Reformed were zealous to avoid. To do otherwise would lead to potential problems in the doctrine of God in which the creation would end up constituting the creator. This is what you get, for instance, in Hegel.⁵⁸

So, here Torrance can speak about the hypostatic union as that union between God and the creation in which God and creation are *actually* reconciled. God took to himself sinful, fallen flesh. And it is this fallen flesh which God has reconciled to himself in the act of hypostatic union. Thus, hypostatic union *is* atonement and reconciliation. This *is* our union with Christ. Lee states Torrance position this way:

... the Incarnation [is] Christ's self-incorporation and entry into our sinful and alienated existence for our reconciliation with God through the Cross, as well as Christ's obedient life, and ministry, mission or atoning work for us. This is because Torrance understands *reconciliation not as something added to hypostatic union, but as the hypostatic union itself at work in expiation and atonement*. In a sense, reconciliation is the inner dynamics of the ontological hypostatic union.⁵⁹

Furthermore, this act of hypostatic union is understood in the form of a “couplet”—*enhypostasia* and *anhypostasia*. These two form the whole of the atonement in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Lee explains:

spoken to us is antecedently the Son or Word of God *per se* ... We have to say that, as Christ is in revelation, so He is antecedently in Himself.” *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004) 415; 428. Hereafter abbreviated as *CD* followed by volume and part.

⁵⁸ The question which this leads to then is the relation between Hegel and Barth (and thus Torrance). However, the scope of this essay prevents us from going into a detailed discussion. Nevertheless, there are works out there which hint at a close connection between Hegel and Barth. See for instance Adam Eitel, “The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Karl Barth and the Historicization of God’s Being,” *IJST* 10/1 (2008): 36-53. Torrance at times sounds concerned with maintaining a creator/creature distinction, and thus an antecedent being which lies back of creation. But his identifying of the ontological and economical Trinity makes this impossible. For a perspective within the Barthian fold that wants to caution against Hegelianism, see Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2002).

⁵⁹ Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, 146 and 157f. Emphasis is mine. This idea of our union taking place in the ontological hypostatic union in which God takes to himself fallen human flesh is a correlate of Barth’s teaching found in, for instance, *CD* I/2, 40 and 151. In the latter page reference, Barth states, “Nor is [Jesus] the ideal man. He is a man as we are, equal to us as a creature, as a human individual, but also equal to us *in the state and condition into which our disobedience and brought us.*” (Emphasis is mine). For more on Torrance’s view of the Son taking fallen flesh to himself, see G. S. Dawson, “Far as the Curse is Found,” in ed. G. S. Dawson, *An Introduction to Torrance Theology: Discovering the Incarnate Savior* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007); Colyer, *Reading T. F. Torrance*, 82; and Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 153.

By the couplet of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* Torrance understands the atonement to be the one act of the Mediator, God-Man. It is not only the act of God, but also the act of God as Man vicariously done as our acts.⁶⁰

Lee notes in a footnote here that *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* roughly correlates to Christ's active and passive obedience. However, it should be noted that the terms are being used here in a sense unique from their historical employment. Historically, *anhypostasia* is the doctrine which denotes that the humanity to be assumed by the eternal *Logos* was not itself personal. *Enhypostasia* denotes the way the humanity become personal at the incarnation by virtue of the assumption of it by the second person of the Trinity. This distinction was never intended to describe an act which God does vicariously on behalf of man.

Back to Torrance, *homoousion* means that Jesus Christ, in his God and human complex—or duplex—is of one substance with the Father. Here we see a development of the Eastern church doctrine of *theosis*.⁶¹ In the incarnation Jesus Christ is not only divine, but his human nature “gets taken up into the life of God” itself,⁶² such that “we must think of the incarnation of the Son as falling within the eternal Life and Being of God.”⁶³ Given this reality it can be said “Jesus Christ the incarnate Son is one in Being and Act with God the Father.”⁶⁴ And this is how man become united to and partakes in God. For the eternal Son did not only take to himself a man (human flesh particularly) but he also took to himself human flesh generally. That is to say, he assumed humanity itself. And not just neutral humanity; but sinful, fallen humanity. And here we must recall the importance of the doctrine of the *non-assumptus*; that which is not assumed can not be healed.⁶⁵ Thus, it is by way of the incarnation that the Son of God takes up, sanctifies, kills, and makes alive again our very corrupt nature.

2.5. Vicarious Response in the Humanity of Christ

While it may appear at times that Torrance allows for a subjective view of union with Christ, we would be misinterpreting him if we closely associated this with the traditional doctrine of union with Christ. In that doctrine there is a real-time work of the Holy Spirit in our subjective experience in which we are given the gift of faith. By this faith—which is our faith, albeit graciously bestowed—we are united to Christ. For Torrance, however, no such human response is demanded for union with

⁶⁰ Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, 188.

⁶¹ See his discussion in *The Trinitarian Faith*, 139. Torrance also states: “[Christ] was not diminished by the envelopment of the body, but on the contrary he deified it and rendered it immortal” (188).

⁶² See, for instance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 95.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶⁵ Torrance develops the doctrine of the *non-assumptus* in many places, some of which include *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 250; *The Mediation of Christ*, 39-42; and *The Trinitarian Faith*, 153-66.

Christ. And this is where his doctrine of Christ's vicarious response comes in:

Jesus Christ *is* our human response to God. Thus we appear before God and are accepted by him as those who are inseparably united to Jesus Christ our great High Priest in his eternal self-presentation to the Father.⁶⁶

This is made possible because Jesus is not merely our representative, but our real onto-substitute. In his vicarious humanity, he acts in our place.⁶⁷ So, the faith which unites us to Christ is a faith which is already exercised vicariously by Christ himself for us.⁶⁸ On this scheme, presumably our union with Christ is never something that takes place independent of or subsequent to the incarnation and vicarious life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But, rather, this union takes place *in* the incarnation of Jesus Christ and, by extension, in his vicarious faith. So any disconnect which we may see elsewhere in Torrance's writings between "objective" and "subjective" union is corrected—or at least further explicated—by his doctrine of Christ's vicarious response for us. This is nowhere more clear than when he closely associates Christ's vicarious faith and our union with him:

... we are yoked together with Jesus in his bearing our burden and are made to share in the almighty strength and immutability of his vicarious faith and faithfulness on our behalf. *Through his incarnational and atoning union with us* our faith is implicated in his faith, and through that implication, far from being depersonalized or dehumanized, it is made to issue freely and spontaneously out of our own human life before God.⁶⁹

Therefore, in his faith Christ vicariously believes on behalf of man. Thus, all of humanity is joined to him. This event happens before God the Father in a once and for all act of union and reconciliation. Again, Torrance could not be more clear when he writes:

He has believed for you, fulfilled your human response to God, even made your personal decision for you, so that he acknowledges you before God as one who as already responded to God *in him*, who has already believed in God through him, and whose personal decision is already implicated in Christ's self-offering to the Father, in all of which he has been fully and completely accepted by the Father, so that in Jesus Christ you are already accepted by him.⁷⁰

Now, it is true that he goes on to say that our faith today is still important.⁷¹ However, it is in no way essential to being united to Christ. Fur-

⁶⁶ *The Mediation of Christ*, 80. Emphasis is his.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 82-3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 84. The emphasis is mine.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

thermore, it is not necessary for salvation. Salvation is accomplished by Christ for us *in his faith*, not ours.

2.6. *The Son and the Spirit*

Thus far we have argued that Torrance sees union with Christ as being an exclusively objective work. Union with Christ takes place by virtue of the hypostatic union: the hypostatic union *is* union with Christ. This certainly seems to be Torrance's view in his earlier writings, such as *The School of Faith* and *The Mediation of Christ*. However, there does appear to be some development in the thought of Torrance with reference to union with Christ. In *The Trinitarian Faith*, for instance, he can speak about the work of the Holy Spirit in uniting the church to Christ. So, we may ask, does Torrance come around to a more traditional view of union with Christ? Does this language lead us to believe that Torrance has a place for a subjective uniting work of the Holy Spirit of believers to Jesus Christ?

To these questions we must answer in the negative. For when Torrance speaks of the Holy Spirit's uniting the church to Christ, here he is once again speaking wholly objectively. For here he has in view nothing less than the Pentecost event. It is at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit, once and for all, is poured out on the church in which Christ through the Spirit has "united it to himself as his Body."⁷² The explicit connection, then, between the incarnation and the event of Pentecost is made by Torrance when he says:

All members of the Church are united to Christ and organically cohere with and in him as one Body in one Spirit. It was thus, for example, that Irenaeus, as we shall see, used to speak of a oneness and *communion with Christ in the most realist sense*, for there takes place in him a *soteriological and ontological unification* of people in whose midst God himself dwells through the presence of his Spirit. This Body is what it is *through the incarnation of the Son of God* in Christ who has gathered up and reformed the human race in himself, and through the astonishing event at *Pentecost when God poured out his own Spirit upon the apostles and disciples of the Lord Jesus thereby giving birth or rather rebirth to the Church and making it participate in his own divine life* and love.⁷³

Any extensive reader of Torrance knows how he can pack much meaning into few words. And so much can be said about this citation. But for our purposes, we make just three points to bring Torrance's hyper-objective soteriology into sharp relief.

First, notice the connection between the incarnation and the Pentecost event. For Torrance, the union we have *in* Christ in the hypostatic union is never separated from the union we have *with* Christ at Pentecost.⁷⁴ Second, it at Pentecost that the church is made to participate in

⁷² *The Trinitarian Faith*, 258.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 254. Emphasis is mine.

⁷⁴ This is where Lee's read of Torrance has gone bad. Lee, as developed above, rightly sees a distinction in Torrance's thinking between union *with* Christ and union *in* Christ.

the life of the Son of God. This is Torrance's version of the *participatio Christi*. And third, here Torrance's objective realism is clearly seen for at Pentecost we have "communion with Christ in the most realist sense." Therefore, any idea of the believer in his life-history being united to Christ by faith and thus having a transition from being under God's divine judgment to being brought into a state of salvation is wholly absent from Torrance's thought. According to Torrance's way of thinking, any such transition and union has already taken place—once and for all—in the incarnation and at Pentecost. It is all done objectively and vicariously by Christ. Christ unites us to God in the incarnation and he unites us to himself through pouring out the Holy Spirit upon the church at Pentecost. There is then no need to speak about a work of the Holy Spirit regenerating the hearts of people today in the subjective life of the believer⁷⁵.

3. Scripture Speaks

It is at this point that we would do well to consider some exegetical thoughts to "referee" between the doctrine of union with Christ in Torrance and that of Calvin and the Reformed tradition. We will contend that while it may be proper to call Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ "Protestant" we can not in any faithful way call it "Reformed." It so diverges from core aspects of Reformed soteriology to make it unrecognizable under the heading "Reformed." It really is so original that it deserves its own distinctive category; whether that be "Barthian" or "neo-orthodox."

Here we must begin with a close examination of Ephesians 2:1-10. But before we do so, some preliminary considerations are in order. And the first consideration is to delimit the scope of our investigation and determine clearly the goal of our exegetical work. In order to preclude Torrance's interpretation and explication of the doctrine of union with Christ as being exclusively objective and incarnational in nature, all we

However, Lee interprets that as meaning a distinction between objective and subjective aspects of salvation. However, for Torrance both aspects are objective and refer to the two aspects—incarnation and Pentecost—of one event.

⁷⁵ However, see *ibid.*, 261 where Torrance speaks of "the regenerating gift of the Holy Spirit" in the context of speaking about the Church's union with Christ. Nevertheless, given his previously cited language of the Holy Spirit giving "rebirth" to the church at Pentecost, we must interpret Torrance's language of regeneration in the light of his objective understanding of rebirth at Pentecost. Likewise, see *ibid.*, 265, in which Torrance speaks about our union coming from the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Well, how does the Holy Spirit dwell in us? In the traditional sense in which Calvin spoke of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us thus uniting us to Christ? Not at all. But this indwelling is again connected to the incarnation and "takes place in Christ, the incarnate Son [and] it involves a somatic and not just a spiritual union in and with him." It is a "union between Christ and the members of his Body as established by incarnation and atonement" (266). Further, we are "rooted in Christ and united together with him through incarnation" (267-8).

The *modus operandi* of Torrance seems to be to first radically redefine traditional orthodox language, and then continue to employ that language in seemingly traditional ways. Yet, we must go back—time and again—to his initial re-definitions to properly interpret later formulations. Only in this way can we do justice to the intricate thought of this profound and complex theologian.

need to show exegetically is that union with Christ has a subjective element to it. That brings us then necessarily to our second consideration; namely, a subjective understanding of union with Christ (or, that the Bible teaches an *ordo salutis*) does not preclude the objective element. In other words, the attempt here to show that there is an existential union with Christ in the life of the believer—that is, a real live transition from wrath to grace—does not negate the all important reality of the finished work of Christ and his people's union with him in the redemptive-historical sphere. Nor does it cancel out the important element of the elect's eternal union with Christ by virtue of the pre-temporal decree of God as one finds in Ephesians 1:4-12. And lastly, *disproving* Barth's claim that union with Christ occurs at the incarnation will not be accomplished directly. Nor does it need to be. Here we are attacking the premise that union with Christ occurs *exclusively* at the incarnation, not that union with Christ occurs *at all* at the incarnation. Hypothetically we can think of someone contending that Barth teaches that union with Christ occurs only proleptically at the incarnation but is subjectively realized in the life of the believer. While it is our opinion that such a formulation is untenable according to the Scriptural witness, nevertheless disproving it is not our goal here. Our goal will be restricted to disproving the claim that union with Christ occurs *exclusively* in an objective sense.

With that being said, let us examine the text of Ephesians 2:1-10 in detail. The first question that comes to mind as we approach this passage is: what does Paul mean when in v. 5 he says that we were made alive together with Christ, *συνεζωποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ*? Reformed exegetes are not altogether united on the answer to this question. For instance, as R. B. Gaffin notes, Herman Ridderbos reads this expression in an exclusively redemptive-historical and objective sense.⁷⁶ In other words, Ridderbos excludes the idea that Paul is speaking about an *ordo salutis* matter here⁷⁷. When Paul says that we were made alive with Christ, what Paul is referring to is the resurrection of Christ as the representative of his people. Thus, he is not referring to an existential change or shift in the life of the sinner-become-believer. It is not a reference to an inner, subjective transformation by which a person is brought from spiritual death to life. In a move that Barth would be comfortable with, Ridderbos states that it is as if Paul is saying that Christ in his objective redemptive work dies and comes to life again *with* the humanity that he represents.

Granted, the grammar of the text allows for this interpretation. The verb *συνεζωποίησεν* is in the aorist, thus indicative of a past event. However, the context makes it impossible. The condition of the sinner-turned-believer before being *συνεζωποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ* is nothing less than *ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν*, dead in our trespasses (5a). This harks back to the opening of the pericope in v. 1 where Paul states that *ὑμᾶς ὄντας νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν*, you were

⁷⁶ Richard B. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987) 42.

⁷⁷ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 211.

dead in your trespasses and sins. In other words, if the being made alive in 5b is a reference to the objective and redemptive-historical event of Christ's resurrection, then the being dead in sins and trespasses must be a reference also to Christ's death. Now, initially, we might think that there is something to this. After all, according to Paul, on the cross Christ become sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) and thus bore the just punishment for the sins of others, which is death (Romans 6:23). However, as Paul expands on his and his reader's sins and trespasses in vv. 2 and 3, we see that this interpretation is impossible. The sins mentioned in v. 1 are the sins ἐν αἷς ποτε περιπατήσατε κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, in which you once walked according to the way of this world.⁷⁸ This means that Paul must be speaking about his and his reader's life experiences, and not the redemptive-historical experience of Christ. Otherwise, we would have to conclude that Jesus walked around in sins that are after the ways of this present evil age (cf. Galatians 1:4). This conclusion would go well beyond even Barth's formulation of the *non-assumptus*.⁷⁹ For Barth the eternal Logos took on fallen, sinful human flesh but he never "walked in" any actual sins and trespasses. Otherwise, we would have to conclude that Christ, walked κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, following the prince of the authority of the air. Gaffin helpfully expounds the relation of v. 5b with its surrounding context:

... the conclusion that [Paul] is describing what has taken place for believers *existentially* is difficult to avoid ... Clearly this 'being dead' is not solidaric involvement with Christ in his death, for it is 'being dead in transgressions'. In view is the actual, existential deadness of Paul and his readers ... Specifically, [verses 2 and 3] provide an extended description of the former moral depravity and guilt of Paul and his readers ... Consequently, the enlivening and resurrection, which took place when they were dead as just defined, at least includes the initial experience of transformation and ethical renewal.⁸⁰

So, are Paul's comments about objective or subjective salvation? The answer is yes. While his comments here are about the subjective appropriation of Christ's benefits, they are always and everywhere conditioned by the objective work of Christ. So, Gaffin can conclude, "While the apostles's perspectives are certainly *heilshistorisch*, his primary interest is decidedly *heilsordelijk*."⁸¹

Thus far we have argued for what we believe Paul is *not* saying in our passage. We have excluded the possibility that when he speaks about being raised with Christ that he is speaking about Christ's resurrection in redemptive history—though his comments are never to be understood apart from that all important event. So, what then *is* he saying? Here we begin with the ὄντας of v. 5a. This is the present, active, participle of the verb εἶμι. And as such carries with it a temporal force.⁸² In other words,

⁷⁸ My translation.

⁷⁹ That is, the idea that the eternal Logos took on fallen human flesh. See *CDI/2*, 151.

⁸⁰ Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*, 42-3. Emphasis is mine.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸² As per Gaffin. *Idem*.

it is in and during the time of death—that is the death of Paul and his readers—that something occurs. It is in their life history when their inner spiritual state was characterized by a life of death, sin, rebellion that something happens. What happened? God (the subject of the clause, as established by v. 4a) made us alive with Christ (τῷ Χριστῷ). The question then becomes, what does Paul mean here by τῷ Χριστῷ? What is the exact force of the dative case? Most naturally, especially given the prefix *sun* in the preceding verb, the noun here is a dative of association.⁸³ The meaning then being: God made us alive—a work elsewhere in Paul attributed to God the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; Titus 3:5; cf. Ezek. 37:14)—by bringing us into association with and taking us into the company of Christ.

This interpretation is further confirmed by v. 6. Again, employing the prefix *sun* to the two main verbs, Paul is emphasizing the togetherness of the believer with Christ in his current resurrected and glorified state. This time, however, Paul uses the more familiar prepositional clause ἐν Χριστῷ. The use of the preposition here is exegetical with reference to the previous verses' use of the dative. Here the preposition plus dative denotes a dative of sphere.⁸⁴ What Paul means is that we have been raised up and seated in the sphere of Christ. We are where Christ now is. So, the quickening of the sinner-made-believer mentioned in v. 5 has its further explication, and we might even say end result, in the bringing of the one made alive into the very place where Christ is. Thus, the believer is both brought to and joined with Jesus Christ by virtue of the quickening work of God the Holy Spirit.

This is what it means to be united to Christ. It is an event in the experiential life of the sinner-become-believer which is subsequent to—although by no means disconnected from—the redemptive-historical act of God in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus Christ. Barth and his followers have wanted to do away with the supposed dualism in traditional Reformed theology between the object and subjective aspects of soteriology. However, all they have done is collapse the latter into the former. Contrary to this tact, Reformed soteriology—at its best anyway—has distinguished between the two aspects *without separating them*.⁸⁵ This can hardly be deemed a “dualism.” Could it be that Torrance was boxing against an antagonist of his own making? It would seem so. Especially given the fact that a careful and thorough exegesis of Ephesians 1 and 2 shows that for the apostle Paul union with Christ has three aspects to it—none of which cancel out the other two.

⁸³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 159-60.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁸⁵ And this is precisely where the work of R. B. Gaffin, Jr. has proven so helpful. It might be argued that an element within Reformed soteriology tended to unduly separate *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis*. Many have reacted against this disconnection—especially in Barthian, New Perspective, and Federal Vision theological circles—in such a way that the *ordo salutis* is all but jettisoned or swallowed up into the *historia salutis*. Gaffin, however, brings to the foreground the *historia salutis* without doing away with the *ordo salutis*. In other words, he gives the *ordo salutis* its rightful place in a thoroughly biblical soteriology.

Ephesians 1:3-11 clearly teaches an eternal union with Christ by way of God's sovereign decree. Ephesians 1:15-23 has in view Christ as our representative head in his salvific work prior to and objective from us in the history of redemption. And the text we examined here, Ephesians 2:1-10, clearly speaks about how we have been joined and united to Christ in our real life histories.

4. Union with Christ in Calvin

At this point we are now in a better position to address the question of the relation between Torrance's explication of union with Christ and that of John Calvin. At first glance, it may seem as if Torrance does fit within the tradition of Calvin. After all, the Genevan Reformer describes the incarnation in this way:

... it was necessary for the Son of God to become for us 'Immanuel' ... in such a way that his divinity and our human nature might by mutual connection grow together. Otherwise the nearness would not have been near enough, nor the affinity sufficiently firm, for us to hope that God might dwell with us.⁸⁶

As T. Hart has pointed up concerning this statement of Calvin's, it appears as if the definitive union requisite for reconciliation and atonement is provided in the incarnation. He argues that here Calvin is equating incarnation, atonement, reconciliation, and union.⁸⁷

However, upon a closer read of Calvin we see that Torrance's doctrine of union with Christ and that of Calvin's couldn't be more opposite. For instance, consider Calvin's well-known maxim which we find at the beginning of book three of the *Institutes*:

First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.⁸⁸

This quotation comes from the third book of the *Institutes*, which is entitled "The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us From It, And What Effects Follow." The title of the book and the aforementioned formulation of the relationship between Christ's work and the believer should make clear the radical difference between Calvin and Torrance. Commenting on the title and then the same words quoted above, R. B. Gaffin observes:

⁸⁶ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) II.XII.1. Hereafter, cited as *Institutes* with book, chapter, and section. This is cited by Hart, "Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind: Salvation as Participation In Our Substitute in the Theology of John Calvin," *SJT* 42 (1989): 83. He cites this passage to support his thesis that for Calvin "... the Incarnation is the Atonement. God and man *have been* reconciled in their personal union in Christ." Emphasis is his.

⁸⁷ "Humankind in Christ," 83.

⁸⁸ *Institutes* III.I.1.

This title plainly shows that Calvin understands himself to be concerned throughout with the application of salvation, its 'benefits' and consequent 'effects'... on the matter at hand no more important words have been written than these. Incisively and in a fundamental way, they address both the *necessity* and *nature* of application, the basic concerns of an *ordo salutis*.⁸⁹

To be sure, Calvin is not advocating a dualism between Christ's finished work on the one hand and the application of that work on the other. But what he does do is make a careful distinction. As Gaffin points up, a careful balance is struck between the *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis*. We can even go so far as to say that in his thinking the *historia* takes priority. Without the history of God's redemption in Christ—without Christ in all of his objective glory *extra nos*—there is nothing to apply. Nevertheless, as long as Christ's person and work remain *extra nos* and never *in nobis*, he remains a nebulous, nominalistic ideal. He never enters into us—into our lives—in the here and now. Without the application of Christ and all his benefits to us, Christ himself remains “of no use to us.”

And so, to prevent any accusation of a “legal fiction”—particularly as it was leveled against the Reformers by the counter-Reformation—Calvin responded with his doctrine of union with Christ. Furthermore, in this section of the *Institutes* Calvin also has in view his controversy with Osiander (which originally took place in the context of the debates between the Lutheran and Reformed over the Lord's Supper). Calvin found himself in the middle with Rome's accusations of a legal fiction on the one side, and Osiander's formulations on the other. Osiander—himself trying to provide an answer to the charge of a “legal fiction”—taught a doctrine of union with Christ in which Christ's divine attribute of righteousness became man's in justification.⁹⁰ This, however, came way too close to violating the creator/creature distinction for Calvin. So, he responded with two “limiting concepts”—union and imputation. Union is what prevents a “legal fiction” (contra Rome); imputation is what prevents a *communicatio idiomatum* (contra Osiander). It is in this controversial milieu that Calvin states the following about the relation between Christ's person and work in the believer:

There is good reason for the repeated mention of the 'testimony of the Spirit,' a testimony we feel engraved like a seal upon our heart, with the result that it seals the cleansing and sacrifice of Christ ... in order that the shedding of his sacred blood may not be nullified, our souls are cleansed by the secret watering of the Spirit ... to sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Richard B. Gaffin, “Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards,” *WTJ* 65/2 (2003): 170.

⁹⁰ On this debate, and its implications for justification and the doctrine of union with Christ, see Mark A. Garcia, “Imputation and the Christology of Union with Christ: Calvin, Osiander, and the Contemporary Quest for a Reformed Model,” *WTJ* 68/2 (2006): 219-51.

⁹¹ *Institutes*, III.I.1.

On the one hand we have Calvin's concern for the *historia salutis* (i.e., "the shedding of his sacred blood"), and on the other hand the application of the work of Christ to us subjectively (i.e., "our souls are cleansed ... by which Christ effectually unites us to himself"). Here Calvin holds in balance and proportion the twin soteriological elements: redemption accomplished and redemption applied. This is further clarified by Calvin in a statement which surely Torrance would not have approved of:

We know, moreover, that he benefits only those whose 'Head' he is, for whom he is 'the firstborn among brethren' ... This union alone ensures that, as far as we are concerned, he has not unprofitably come with the name of Savior ... But he unites himself to us by the Spirit alone. By the grace and power of the same Spirit we are made his members, to keep us under himself and in turn to possess him.⁹²

The union that is effected by the Holy Spirit assures that Christ's name as Savior is not in vain. What does Calvin mean by this? Basically, he is restating in different terms what he said at the opening of Book III: as long as Christ remains outside of us, he is of no profit to us. He does not actually save anyone without the "benefit" of his work being applied. Redemption must not only be given and wrought, but it must also be applied and received in the here and now of the believer's life. For Torrance, the giving and the receiving of redemption both take place at once and the same time in the incarnation. For Calvin, the giving and receiving of redemption are two distinct—though never separated—events in the plan of salvation.

After a lengthy section on the doctrine of sanctification (chapters 2-10 of book III), Calvin then enters into a discussion of the doctrine of justification in chapter 11. In the opening section of this chapter, he explains why it is that he treated the doctrine of sanctification before justification. He did so to show how "it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith through which alone we obtain free righteousness."⁹³ This is a clear reference to the charges of Rome that the Reformation doctrine of justification was a "legal fiction" and did not allow for any renewal in the life of the believer. Calvin's response was that union with Christ yields a two-fold grace (*duplex gratia*) which flows from that union: justification and regeneration ("regeneration" is used here synonymously with our term "sanctification"). In other words, where there is justification there is sanctification. Where there is a legal declaration of righteousness, there is also moral renewal. In Christ these two benefits are never separated, although—and this is all important—they are never confused either. Thus, sanctification flows from the believer's union with Christ, and not from his justification. If it did flow from justification, the latter would have a transforming power (a notion Calvin wanted to avoid at all cost).

In addition, Calvin goes on to introduce the concept of imputation. And here is the second prong of his defense—this time against Osiander.

⁹² *Institutes*, III.I.3.

⁹³ *Institutes*, III.XI.1.

Whereas Osiander wanted to posit the actual divine attribute of Christ's righteousness as the "stuff" of man's justification, Calvin spoke about imputation as the way to maintain the creator/creature distinction and avoid a *communicatio idiomatum*. So, justification is not to be confused with sanctification but is rather

... simply ... the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness ... Therefore, 'to justify' means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if his innocence were confirmed. Therefore, since God justifies us by the intercession of Christ, he absolves us not by the confirmation of our own innocence, but by the imputation of righteousness.⁹⁴

Here imputation accomplishes two things. First, it distinguishes justification from sanctification (however, union with Christ limits the distinction between these two benefits such that they are never separated).⁹⁵ And, second, it *distinguishes* the nature and essence of the believer and Christ—all the while keeping both believer and Christ *un-separated* by virtue of the union involved. This sets the table for his polemic against Osiander in sections 5-12 of III.XI. It is here that he explains that Osiander's view of "essential righteousness" not only confuses the divine essence of Christ with the human essence of man⁹⁶, but it confuses justification and sanctification as well.⁹⁷

Much more may be said concerning the (radical) differences between Calvin and Torrance on the doctrine of union with Christ. However, we have space here for only one more point. The idea of union with Christ being understood along incarnational lines is not new within the development of Torrance's soteriology and Barth before him. In Calvin's own day such a view was propounded, discussed, and outright rejected by him and his followers. A classic example is found in Calvin's correspondence with Peter Martyr Vermigli, the Italian reformer. This correspondence, explored in depth with reference to the doctrine of union with Christ by W. D. Rankin,⁹⁸ mentions three "strata" on union with Christ: 1) incarnational, 2) mystical, and 3) spiritual. Vermigli describes the incarnational union between Christ and man as being a natural and non-redemptive union; thus making it "very general and feeble."⁹⁹ It is significant how Calvin responds to this formulation. It is true that concerning

⁹⁴ *Institutes*, III.XI.2-3.

⁹⁵ Herman Bavinck puts it succinctly when he writes, "in his opposition to Osiander, Calvin makes a sharp distinction between justification and sanctification, for the former is a purely forensic act; but he never separates the two and consistently keeps them very closely connected ... Christ does not justify anyone whom he does not also at the same time sanctify. We, accordingly, are not justified by works, but neither are we justified without works." *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation; v. IV* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 200.

⁹⁶ At one point Calvin states that Osiander's view is bordering on Manichaeism, *Institutes*, III.XI.5.

⁹⁷ *Institutes*, III.XI.6.

⁹⁸ Rankin, "Carnal Union," 176-189.

⁹⁹ Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008) 275.

Vermigli's letter Calvin says "we entirely agree in sentiment."¹⁰⁰ However, concerning the idea of incarnational union specifically, he all but ignores it. How are we to take his silence? Rankin offers the following explanation:

There is no hint of duplicity in Calvin's dealings with Martyr here. Calvin is comfortable passing over incarnational communion when answering Peter Martyr's plea for his own frank opinion on the doctrine of union with Christ. Martyr and Calvin were very close in their mutual theology, friendship, and regard at this point in their lives. Thus, it is patently unreasonable to suspect that in passing over incarnational communion Calvin had something to hide. In disregarding the topic, is Calvin not implying that the wider subject can be adequately treated without it?¹⁰¹

The obvious answer to Rankin's question here is "yes." Calvin ignores the idea because it really does not pertain to the issue at hand, which is redemptive in nature. He hurries on to mystical and spiritual union because the nature of incarnational union is non-redemptive and "feeble." This view of incarnational union, then, stands worlds apart from that found in Torrance. For the Scottish professor, incarnational union is soteriologic in nature and universal in scope. For Calvin and Vermigli, however, this union does not reconcile or atone in and of itself. In other words, Torrance believes that the incarnation effects man's union with Christ and thus his redemption; however, for Calvin the incarnation does not effect a redeeming union between Christ and man. For Torrance union with Christ takes place exclusively in the incarnation; for Calvin union with Christ is something which happens by the Holy Spirit's work in us. A more pronounced difference between two views could not be drawn.

Conclusion and Evaluation

What T. F. Torrance (and those Barthian theologians who think along his lines) has done for theology should not be underestimated; even given some of the above crucial reservations. Torrance—given his disdain for dualisms—has reminded us not to tear asunder what God hath joined together. He has reminded us that we ought not to polarize the humanity and divinity of Christ in such a way that we fall into Docetism on the one hand, or Arianism on the other. His disdain for dualism, and his search for a grand unifying theory of theology, forms the guts of his theological program. With these things in mind, he offers us some possibilities for a future constructive theology and apologetic against modern day Arianism. Also helpful has been his reminder that we ought not to think about faith (i.e., our faith) as some autonomous creature that we must awaken in order to make Christ's atonement effectual. He is mistaken, however, to *replace* the believer's personal faith as the alone instrument by which he is united to Christ with Jesus' vicarious faith and faithfulness. Here we cannot help noticing that the dualism which Torrance so vehemently

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 276 ff.

¹⁰¹ Rankin, "Carnal Union," 188.

decries is still resident in his thinking. Even so, in so much as he reminds us not to obsess over our own subjective experiences, but to look outside of ourselves to Christ instead, he has hinted at ways to building a constructive soteriology.

Nevertheless, these positive elements in the thinking of T. F. Torrance are far outweighed by his problematic proposals. This is evident in at least two ways. First, in his unifying program in which all dualism are eliminated, all important theological distinctions seem to get tossed as well.¹⁰² On the basis of the exegesis of Scripture, we must stand with Calvin and his understanding of the need of the application of Christ's benefits to us "here and now" by virtue of the Holy Spirit's uniting us to Christ by faith. Or—to use the categories so helpfully set out by Calvin, Ridderbos, and Gaffin—in so much as the *historia salutis* stands outside of us and apart from the *ordo salutis*, Christ is of no use to us.

Second, given the correlative doctrines of the *homoousion* and *non-assumptus*, one is led to wonder how Torrance can possibly avoid a sinful God. If Jesus Christ—in his human and divine complex—is divinized (made to be of one substance with the Father), and if one aspect of that complex is sinful humanity, then would it not follow that God—at the incarnation—becomes sinful? Elsewhere, this form of thinking does lead Torrance to advance a doctrine of divine passibility¹⁰³. But what is good for one aspect of the life of Christ must be good for another. If *homoousion* and the *non-assumptus* lead Torrance to conclude divine *passibility*, then what is to stop us from concluding divine *peccability*? Once Torrance allows for the creation to constitute the divine nature, what is to prevent us from affirming a sinful God? This problem remains unanswered by Barthian theologians.

To be sure, we want to be careful to avoid all *unbiblical* dualisms. But just because a theological formulation is in the form of a dualism, doesn't necessarily make it unbiblical. The Bible itself makes use of dualistic concepts. A case in point is the twofold way in which Scripture speaks about Christ's finished work on the one hand, and the application of the benefits of that work on the other. For Torrance "union with Christ" is swallowed up by "union in Christ." The *unio mystica* disappears into *unio hypostasia*, and the *ordo salutis* is collapsed into the *historia salutis*. If traditional theology has been guilty of rending asunder what God hath joined together, then Torrance is guilty of joining together what God hath deemed distinct. And now, we are back to the wisdom of Chalcedon. As with the two natures in one person, so with many Chris-

¹⁰² Rankin, 55ff. Here Rankin helpfully explores Torrance's thought and shows that from very early on (in fact from the days of his lecturing at Auburn Theological Seminary where his notes were hastily put together) this idea of unifying theology such that the traditional distinctions were all but dissolved. Some of the instances Rankin cites are: the active and passive obedience of Christ, his person and work, the being of God and his act, the hypostatic union and atonement, the two natures of Christ, and of course incarnation union and union with Christ. It is not an overstatement to say that the architectonic concept holding together all of Torrance's thought is the unifying and eliminating of theological-conceptual dualism.

¹⁰³ *The Trinitarian Faith*, 185.

tian doctrines: we must distinguish without separating and join without confusing.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ A classic example of this is found in the Trinitarian theology of Karl Rahner where he eliminates any distinction between the ontological and economic Trinity in his famous maxim, "The immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity." This flows from, of course, Barth's identifying God's being with his acts. For a traditional response, see Dennis W. Jowers, "A Test of Karl Rahner's Axiom, 'The Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity and Vice Versa,'" *Thomist*, 70:3 (2006): 421-55.