



THOMAS F.
TORRANCE

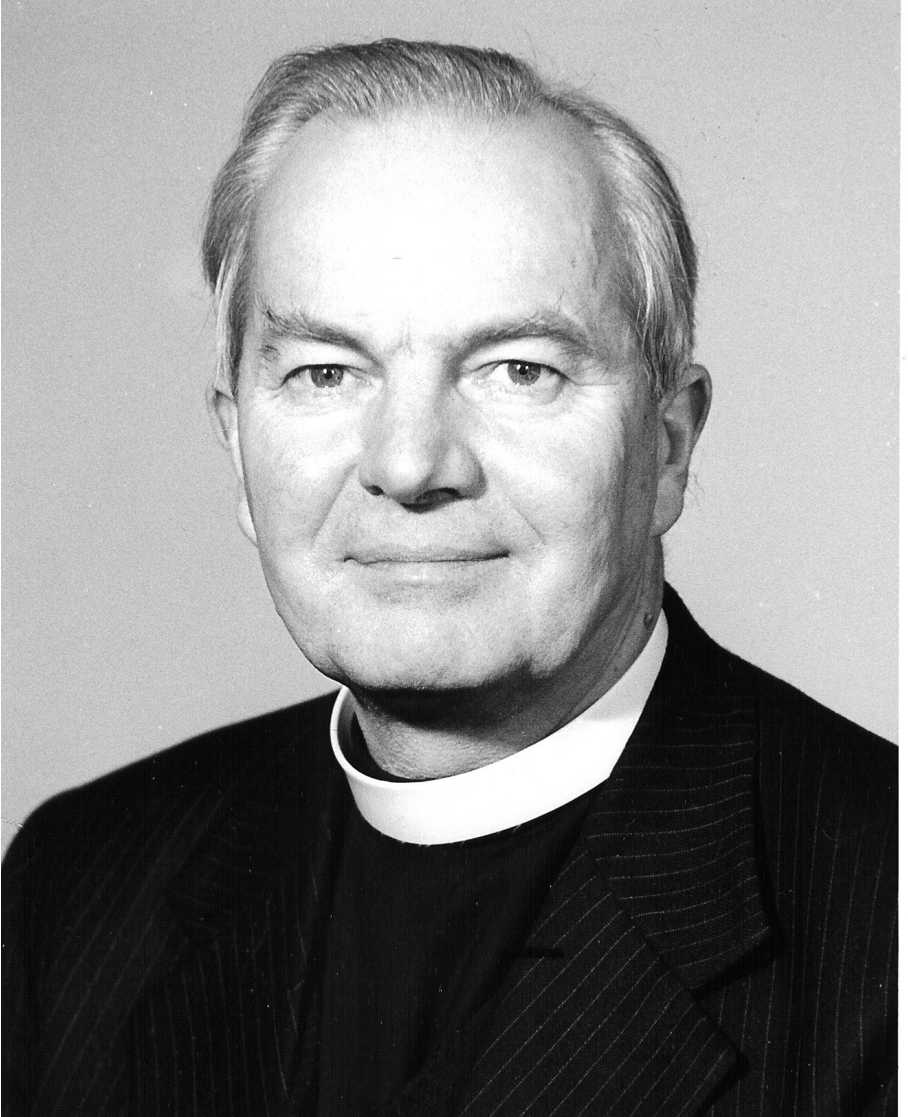
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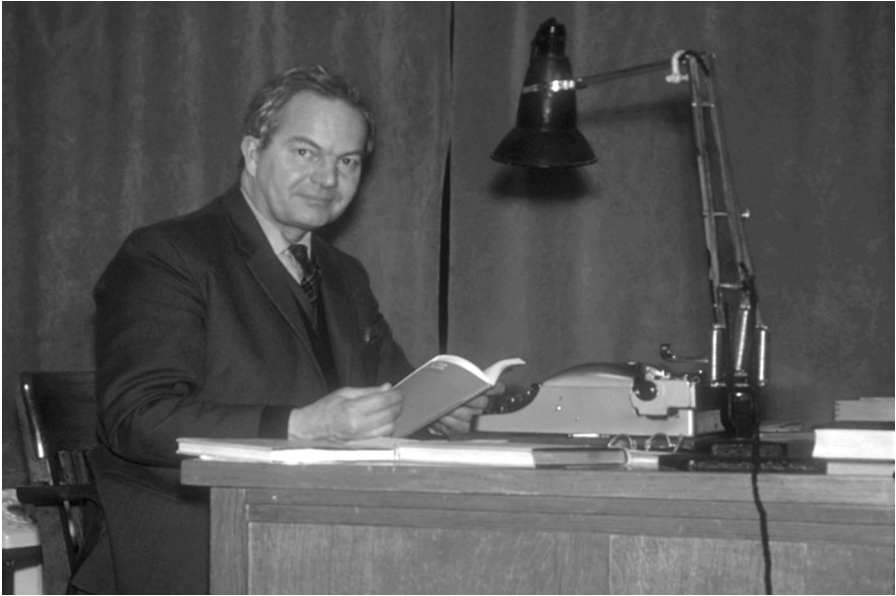
Atonement

The Person and Work of Christ

EDITED BY

ROBERT T. WALKER





Torrance at his desk, reading E.H. Hutten, *The Ideas of Physics*



H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh presenting the Templeton Prize to T.F. Torrance on 21st March 1978 at Buckingham Palace

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Thomas F. Torrance

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Robert T. Walker



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CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	vii
Synopsis	ix
Editor's Introduction	xxxv
Acknowledgements	lxxxiii
1 The Atonement in the New Testament	1
2 Redemption in the Light of the Old Testament	25
3 The Priesthood of Christ	61
4 The Atonement in the Teaching of St Paul: Atonement as Justification	97
5 Atonement as Reconciliation	137
6 Atonement as Redemption	171
7 The Resurrection of Jesus Christ	201
8 The Nature of the Resurrection Event	243
9 The Ascension and Parousia of Jesus Christ	265
10 The Biblical Witness to Jesus Christ: The Coming of the Spirit and the Creation of Apostolic Testimony and Gospel	315
11 The One Church of God in Jesus Christ	341
12 Jesus Christ the First and the Last: the Eschatological Perspective of the Gospel	401
Epilogue: The Reconciliation of Mind	437
Brief Guide to Further Reading	448
Glossary	452
General Index	463
Index of Biblical References	477

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one of the photos used in volume 1

PREFACE by Thomas S. Torrance

This book on Atonement is a companion volume to that on Incarnation published in the autumn of 2008. As was the case with the earlier volume, my late father Thomas Forsyth Torrance had planned to publish this work earlier in the present decade but had been prevented from completing the necessary editing work by the stroke he suffered in January 2003. And as with the former volume, the task of preparing the underlying material for publication has been expertly undertaken by my cousin Robert Torrance Walker. The final outcome, I feel sure, corresponds exactly with what my father had initially intended to offer for publication. A good part of the content of this volume originated in ideas presented in lectures my father delivered, in evolving form, up to his retirement from New College, University of Edinburgh, at the end of the 1978-79 Academic Session. I am delighted that the theological discussions in the present volume can now be available more widely, and extremely grateful to Robert for his unwavering dedication over a long period to securing this end.

Department of Economics
Heriot-Watt University
Edinburgh, May 2009

SYNOPSIS

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

xxxv

The purpose of the introduction

A The relation between Incarnation and Atonement: Christology and Soteriology

xxxvi

The concept of the person of Christ and of salvation in his person
Christology and Soteriology, person and work not to be separated
One whole Christ from birth to ascension and a contrast of emphases in
Christology and Soteriology
The hypostatic union is the heart of both Christology and Soteriology
The hypostatic union is one dynamic event from incarnation to ascension
The hypostatic union is ongoing event worked out through death into
new creation
Soteriology as Christology worked out, person and work as one whole
Christ

B The leading themes of Torrance's Soteriology

xxxix

The approach to the atonement

xxxix

The mystery of atonement – we can only start from the decisive new act
of God in Christ
The Old Testament the essential preparation to understanding the
atonement in Jesus
The atonement is ultimately inconceivable outside the person and act of
Jesus
Concepts of atonement transformed and held together in Christ

1 The theology of the atonement

xli

(a) Atonement is the fulfilment of the covenant: the significance of Christ as God and man

The place of the sacraments in expressing better than words the meaning
of atonement

(b) The life of Christ a ransom, poured out on the cross for the redemption of the many

(c) The priesthood of Jesus Christ and the letter to the Hebrews

(d) Atonement as justification, reconciliation and redemption in the teaching of Paul

(i) Justification, reconciliation and redemption are complete in the person
and work of Christ

(ii) Justification, reconciliation and redemption are the act of God and man in
Christ

(iii) Justification, reconciliation and redemption can only take place through the
complete assertion of the truth of God and the complete fulfilment of the law

(iv) Justification, reconciliation and redemption are the liberation of humanity from the abstract legal and ethical order into direct personal relation with God

(v) Atonement as justification, reconciliation and redemption is completed and actualised in the church through the sending of the Spirit

(vi) Justification, reconciliation and redemption which are essentially corporate in Christ reach out to the whole of creation in a cosmic peace

2 The resurrection and ascension of Jesus and his sending of the Spirit

xlviiii

(a) The resurrection of Jesus Christ

(i) The resurrection is the mighty act of God in the person of Christ defeating death

(ii) The resurrection is the fulfilment of the incarnation and atonement
The resurrection is the fulfilment of justification and without it justification is empty

(iii) The resurrection is the beginning of the new creation headed by Jesus

(iv) A real resurrection is fundamental to the Christian faith

(v) The nature of the resurrection event

The resurrection is an event in history but one going beyond it into a new creation

The openness and non-prescriptiveness of the modern concept of scientific law

(b) The ascension of Jesus Christ

(i) The ascension creates a pause in the *parousia*, creating time for the gospel before the final coming of Jesus

(ii) The ascension is the obverse of the incarnation and marks its fulfilment

(iii) The ascension and the sending of the Spirit mark the completion of the atonement

(iv) A proper doctrine of the ascension is fundamental to the Christian faith

(1) The ascension and the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ as king, priest and prophet

The ascension of Christ the king

The ascension of Christ the priest

The ascension of Christ the prophet

(2) The ascension and the final coming of Jesus

(v) The nature of the ascension event

An event in space and time but going beyond them

(c) The coming of the Holy Spirit and the creation of the apostles and apostolic tradition

(i) The role of the Spirit is to witness to Christ and open the human mind and heart to his truth

The Spirit is the 'shaliach' in whom Christ himself is present and active

(ii) The creation of the apostolate as the definitive and authorised witness to Jesus Christ

(iii) The creation of apostolic tradition and the New Testament

(iv) The question of the relation between the Word made flesh and the written word

(d) The doctrine of scripture: the apostolic (and prophetic) basis of the church

(i) The basic text of the New Testament is the obedient humanity of Jesus Christ

(ii) The New Testament is the inspired secondary text

(iii) The person of Christ is the key to understanding the relation of the Word to the written word

(1) The parallels between the hypostatic union of God and man and of the Word with the written word

(2) The differences between God in Christ and the Word in the written word

Torrance's doctrine of scripture is deeply Christological

The significance of Jesus Christ as Word of God to man become obedient human word

A doctrine of scripture must be patterned on and reflect the uniqueness of the person of Christ

3 *The one church of God in Jesus Christ*

lx

(a) The church is the work of three divine persons, grounded in their eternal communion

(b) The three forms of the one church of God

(c) The church is the body of Christ – the twofold New Testament usage

(d) The church is the provisional form of the new creation

(i) The completeness and finished nature of the work of Christ in his person

(ii) What has been completed intensively in Christ must now be fulfilled extensively in the church and in all creation

The church is the servant and herald whose whole life and essence is to be found in Christ alone

(e) The church is part of the creed and an essential part of faith in the gospel

(f) The attributes of the church – one, holy, catholic and apostolic church

4 *The eschatological perspective of Torrance's theology*

lxiii

The two dimensions of eschatology, vertical and horizontal

The concept of eschatological 'tension' – the pressure of the 'end' on and in time and history

The twofold nature of eschatological tension, between eternity and time, and present and future

The various elements in the inner logic of New Testament eschatology

(a) The coming of God into time throws the world into crisis creating 'the last days'

(b) God's entering time to effect salvation as man in Jesus makes it reality in our midst

(c) The one person of Jesus is the complete salvation of God fulfilled for all in their place

(d) The tension in the encounter with Jesus between old and new creation, death and life

(e) The ascension and partial distancing in hope of the eschatological focus of tension

(f) Pulled upward and forward, through union with Christ by the Spirit and the outreach of the gospel, to the realisation of Christ's kingdom at his coming

The various strands in New Testament eschatology cannot be neatly isolated and can only be understood as a whole

C The challenge of Torrance's theology lxix

1 The nature of the incarnation lxx

(a) The person of Christ

(b) The incarnation is real physical event, the act of God in all his fullness in space and time

(c) The incarnation is dynamic event completed in the atonement and resurrection

2 The nature of Jesus Christ as substitute and representative for humanity lxxii

The key concepts of 'two natures in one person' and of 'anhypostasia' and 'enhypostasia'

(a) Anhypostasia and enhypostasia in the relation between God and man in Christ himself

- (i) *Anhypostasia* – the assumption by Christ of the human nature of all humanity as substitute in their place
- (ii) *Enhypostasia* – the action of Christ as an individual man representing each human person
- (iii) The completeness of salvation from the side of God and of man in Christ

(b) Anhypostasia and enhypostasia in the relation between Christ and humanity

- (i) Radical substitution and radical representation in Torrance's theology
 - The 'vicarious humanity' of Jesus Christ – he takes our place in faith
 - The 'vicarious humanity' of Jesus Christ intensifies the need for faith, demanding an even more radical repentance
- (ii) The significance of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* for the nature of salvation in Christ and its mode of operation in humanity
 - (1) Anhypostasia – the act of God for the salvation of all
 - (2) Enhypostasia – salvation for all is inside the one man Jesus Christ
 - (3) Salvation is not automatic but received individually and personally in encounter with Jesus Christ

(c) Anhypostasia and enhypostasia in the relation between Christ and the response of faith

Just as Christ's humanity is fully real and enhypostatic in his person so human faith is fully real and enhypostatic in Christ
Torrance's early use of an- and en-hypostasia to illuminate other modes of expression

Jesus Christ's own faith is realised in us through the Spirit

The enhypostatic inseparability of our faith from that of Jesus Christ himself

3 *Knowledge of God through the Son or Word in God*

lxxix

(a) **The trinitarian basis of all knowledge of God through Jesus Christ**

The ultimate bedrock of knowledge of God is that the incarnate Word is the Word within God

The Word has always been Word and person in God

The incarnation means the Word of God is now eternally incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ

(b) **A deeper view of scripture focussed on the mediator between God and man**

(i) The Word and truth of God identical with Jesus Christ who always makes himself known

(ii) A simple identification of scripture with the truth of God bypasses the incarnate mediator

(iii) A christological understanding of the truth of scripture

The challenge of knowing scripture and interpreting it theologically and doxologically in Christ

Chapter One

THE ATONEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

1

1 *The approach to the doctrine of atonement*

2

(a) **The mystery of atonement**

(b) **A decisive new deed of divine intervention**

No mere theory of the atonement is possible

(c) **Atonement in the blood of Christ**

(i) The gradual unfolding of Jesus' mission in word and act

(ii) The final unfolding of Jesus' mission in word and act

2 *The Old Testament covenant and its fulfilment*

7

The covenant of Sinai: 'I will be your God, you shall be my people'

The covenant fulfilled through the faithfulness of God, in judgement and redemption

The promises and the commands of the covenant both fulfilled in Christ

(a) **The signs and seals of the covenant – circumcision and passover**

(i) The derivation of the word 'covenant', *berith*

(1) *Barah*, cut – covenant by cutting or sacrifice

(2) *Barah*, eat – the concept of the covenant meal

(3) *Baru*, bind, bond – the bond of the covenant

(ii) The inauguration of the new covenant at the last supper

(b) **The covenant and the cult**

(i) The establishment of the covenant at Sinai and its liturgical extension in the cult

(ii) The difference between covenant sacrifice and daily sacrifice

(iii) Christ's fulfilment of the covenant sacrifice

(c) The mediator of the new covenant

- (i) The Old Testament priest as witness to the word of God
It is God who forgives: liturgical sacrifice is only witness to God's forgiveness
- (ii) Moses and Aaron – the mediation of the word and priestly witness
The priesthood of the word and the priesthood of liturgical witness operate together and point forward to the 'suffering servant'
- (iii) Jesus the servant who fulfils the Old Testament priesthood and inaugurates the covenant in his own life and death
'The blood of the covenant' – covenant sacrifice and covenant communion
'A ransom for many' – the integration of the person and work, life and death of Jesus
The need to interpret the two sayings of Jesus together

Chapter Two**REDEMPTION IN THE LIGHT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT 25**

The constraint of the Old Testament scriptures on the life of Jesus
The relation of the New Testament to the Old – and of the Greek to the Hebrew

1 The Old Testament terms for redemption 27**(a) *Padah, pidyon (lutrousthai, lutron), redeem, ransom***

- (i) The redemption of Israel out of Egypt and 'the house of bondage'
- (ii) Redemption out of divine judgement and alien oppression into the liberty of the kingdom of God
Redemption through expiation from guilt and the power of sin and darkness
- (iii) Redemption from the wrongful '*exousia*' or authority of evil
- (iv) Redemption from sin and evil by the holiness and obedience of Christ
Redemption that destroys the usurped authority of evil and frees humanity

(b) *Kipper, kopher (lutrousthai, lutron), redeem, ransom*

The meaning of '*kipper*': God covers sin through the provision of an equivalent

- (i) The wholeness of redemption
No dichotomy between law and cult, moral and religious, or physical and spiritual
- (ii) The primacy of the covenant in both law and cult
- (iii) Atonement lies in God's own will to pardon
Sins within the covenant covered by God's provision of the annual covenant sacrifice
Sins outside the covenant covered only by God's direct action in judgement and mercy
- (iv) The converging lines of thought in the Old Testament
 - (1) Redemption is grounded in the covenant will of God
 - (2) God must provide the lamb for judgement – the suffering servant
Moses the servant of the Lord as the figure behind the suffering servant
 - (3) The covenant must be done into the flesh – the need for a new covenant

(c) Gaal, goel, redeem, redeemer

Redemption out of slavery or forfeited rights through a kinship in blood and property

Goel redemption is through the person of the *goel* and the kinship of the redeemer

- (i) The Old Testament application of the *goel* concept to God himself
 - (1) God alone can be *goel* in death and judgement
 - (2) God is the faithful *goel*, the holy one who redeems through judgement and sanctification
 - (3) God is *goel* in virtue of the bond of covenant love
- (ii) The New Testament application of the *goel* concept to Jesus
 - (1) Kinsman-redeemer
 - (2) Advocate
 - (3) The redeemer of the inheritance
 - (4) Jubilee redemption
 - (5) The avenger of death

2 Padah, kipper and goel put together

50

(a) An outline of *padah*, *kipper* and *goel* redemption in the New Testament**(b) An outline of the various aspects of redemption in relation to each other**

- (i) The dramatic element in redemption
- (ii) The cultic-forensic element – piacular, expiatory redemption
- (iii) The ontological element in redemption
- (iv) A rough classification of the different church traditions

3 Historical emphases in the doctrine of atonement

56

(a) Theories of atonement in relation to the three Old Testament aspects of redemption

- (i) The dramatic aspect of atonement
- (ii) The cultic-forensic aspect of atonement
- (iii) The ontological aspect of atonement
 - The unifying effect of the celebration of the eucharist in the church

(b) Christ's threefold office in relation to the three aspects**(c) A third method of correlation****(d) The correlations summarised****Chapter Three****THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST**

61

1 The threefold office of Christ in atonement

61

The *goel* relation

The *kipper* and *padah* relation

The interweaving of the different emphases

2 The final fulfilment of law and cult

63

(a) The Old Testament tension between prophet and priest, and word and liturgy

- (i) Priestly independence and prophetic protest
- (ii) The rehabilitation of *torah* and cult after the exile
 - (1) Liturgised law and legalised liturgy
 - (2) No room for the prophet

(b) The fulfilment of law and cult in the Word made flesh

- (i) The primacy of the living Word, calling both scribe and priest to account
- (ii) Jesus' fulfilment of priestly obedience and liturgical witness
 - Prophetic ministry in word, and priestly ministry in action, combined in the suffering servant

(c) An outline of Christ's faithful priestly mediation

- (i) Priestly propitiation – personal healing and reconciliation
- (ii) Priestly penitence – oneness of mind between God and man
 - The repentance into which Christ was baptised
- (iii) Priestly prayer – Christ's self-offering in word and in life
- (iv) Priesthood and sonship – atonement anchored in the Father-Son relation

3 The doctrine of priestly atonement in the New Testament 72

Two main emphases corresponding to the Mosaic and Aaronic aspects of priesthood

The two emphases supply the twin foundation for the doctrine of atonement

(a) The parallels between Hebrews and Paul

In both Paul and Hebrews atonement is grounded on the person of Christ

(b) Mediation from the side of God and from the side of man**(c) The oneness and indivisibility of Christ's act as God and as man****4 Atonement in the epistle to the Hebrews** 77**(a) The priesthood of Christ the incarnate Son**

- (i) Priesthood through faithful Sonship in humanity
- (ii) Christ's priesthood unique and eternal
 - (1) The Old Testament liturgy as type and shadow
 - (2) A continual reminder of sin – the way through the veil was not yet open
 - (3) Christ is both priest and sacrifice
 - (4) Christ the priest of the resurrection
 - (5) Christ the high priest on the day of atonement, representing all Israel
 - Atonement takes place in the person of Christ and we are accepted in his self-offering
 - Christ is so really one with us in our humanity, that what he did we did in him

(b) Atonement through the mediation of Christ

- (i) The contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant, Sinai and Calvary
- (ii) The new basis and the new approach
 - The voice of judgement is identical with the voice of forgiveness
 - Only the one who justly condemns us can really forgive us
 - The irrevocable nature of atonement and the free grace of God
- (iii) The unique act of atonement

- (1) The oneness of the divine representative and the human representative
 - The 'confession' of Christ, as apostle and high priest, in word and in actual life
 - Confession by God in judgement and truth, and by man in the obedient amen of the cross
 - Jesus' confession before Pilate and on the cross is the counterpart to his heavenly confession before the Father
 - Christ's confession is our true and only confession
 - Christ's one objective confession is completed in the subjective confession and worship of the church
- (2) The identity of the person of the atoner and the deed of atonement
- (3) The perfect obedience of Christ, the merciful and faithful high priest
- (iv) Atonement and redemption – their eschatological setting
 - The making of a definite past and the creation of an entirely new future

Chapter Four

THE ATONEMENT IN THE TEACHING OF ST PAUL: ATONEMENT AS JUSTIFICATION

97

The emphasis and approach of St Paul in contrast to Hebrews

The similarities of doctrine but difference of approach between Paul and Hebrews

The theme of Romans: the revelation of the saving righteousness of God in the gospel

1 *Atonement as justification – the righteousness of God*

99

(a) The meaning of 'justify' and 'righteousness'

(i) The Hebrew '*tsedeq*', righteous and '*tsedeqah*', righteousness

(ii) The Greek '*dikaionē*', righteousness

God's righteousness implicates us in it and becomes event and truth in our midst

(b) Three key elements in justification

2 *Atoning justification – the fulfilment of God's righteousness in truth*

104

Justification is at once God's word and God's act

(a) Justification as God's word – 'revealed from faith to faith'

The one revelation of righteousness which uncovers sin and reveals grace

(b) Justification as God's act

The one deed and word of justification that exposes our wrong and puts us in the right

The radical significance of justification by faith – Christ alone is our righteousness

3 *The double problem in justification*

109

(a) How can God be just and the justifier of the ungodly?

(b) How can God intensify human sin?

(c) The nature of sin and law

- (i) Human rebellion and divine judgement – the apparent toleration of sin
- (ii) The distance between man and God given a relative validity through law and the withholding of final judgement
 - The establishment and interim validity of the ethical order
 - Old Testament law is suspended revelation of righteousness, not yet fulfilled revelation
- (iii) The use of the law as an abstract buffer against God
 - The law as the strength of sin
- (iv) Atonement as the actualisation of truth in the midst of abstract truth

4 Justification and law

114

The bondage of law

God steps out from behind the law to reveal himself face to face

(a) Justification is an act of God ‘under the law’

Justification can only take place through the complete fulfilment of law and judgement

(b) Justification is an act of God ‘apart from law’

- (i) God now deals with us immediately in grace, and no longer through the veil of law
- (ii) Justification is ‘revelation’, a stupendous new act of God
- (iii) Justification ends all abstraction, without any mitigation of law and judgement
- (iv) An objective event, of justification and forgiveness, which is ultimately unfathomable

5 Justification and the act of atonement

120

(a) The death of Christ was an expiatory sacrifice

Jesus takes our guilt and judgement on himself, in perfect submission to the divine verdict

- (i) An act of God as God and man – *enhypostatic* atonement
 - Atonement is act of God, but also real act of real man, *enhypostatic* in Christ
- (ii) Justification is twofold, God in judgement, and man in satisfaction and holiness
- (iii) The double faithfulness of Christ as God and man, the judge and judged
 - The judgement of the judge takes place within his own person as the one judged

(b) The death of Christ the atoning deed of the one for the many

- (i) The problem of substitution – how can one die for another and do it justly?
- (ii) Only the creator Word can be ‘the one for the many’
- (iii) The overcoming of the gap between the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’
- (iv) The resurrection is the ground of justification
- (v) Justification is essentially corporate

(c) Justification in atonement means rectification and redemption

- (i) The backward reference of justification
 - (1) The undoing of the past and of guilt
 - (2) Contact re-established with creation
 - (3) The past made to serve the purpose of redemption

- (ii) The forward reference of justification
 - (1) Justification is participation in the righteousness of Christ
 - (2) Justification is a completed reality awaiting disclosure
 'Imputation' is the concept that holds together the completed reality and its future disclosure

Chapter Five

ATONEMENT AS RECONCILIATION 137

1 *The New Testament words for reconciliation* 137

Katallassō: reconciliation through substitutionary exchange and expiation

(a) **The meaning of *hilaskesthai*, to be merciful or propitious, forgive**

The Septuagint use of *hilaskesthai* and *exilaskesthai*

Paul's use of *katallassō* equivalent to the Old Testament use of *hilaskesthai*

(b) **The meaning of *katallassō*, reconcile**

(i) Romans 5.8-11: 'reconciled to God'

(ii) 2 Corinthians 5.14-21: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself'

(iii) Ephesians 2.13-16 and Colossians 1.19-22 – the use of *apokatallasso*

2 *The New Testament doctrine of reconciliation* 145

(a) **Reconciliation as the pure act of God's love**

'God loved us even when he hated us'

The self-giving of God in love to humanity to take our cause upon himself

The fulfilment of covenant mercy in gathering man into the embrace of divine love

(b) **Reconciliation is achieved and completed *in the person of the incarnate Son***

(i) Reconciliation is the full outworking of the hypostatic union from birth to death

(ii) Reconciliation is the fulfilment of God's assumption of our humanity

(c) **Reconciliation as wonderful exchange**

Christ's complete identification with us and intervention in our place

Christ so one with God that what he did God did, and so one with us that what he did we did

(d) **Reconciliation as peace with God**

(i) Peace through Christ's bearing the judgement and removing the righteous wrath of God's love

The will of God's love fully fulfilled and the objective obstacle removed

(ii) The removal of ethical and legal distance by the fulfilment of judgement

(1) God takes on himself his own rejection of humanity and directs to them only the positive act of acceptance

(2) There is no positive act of rejection of any human being

(3) The very nature of the gospel is to bring salvation – 'reprobation is accidental'

(e) Reconciliation is objective and subjective

Atonement must be worked into the mind and heart of man, defeating sin from within

God's personal forgiveness and creation of joint knowing between man and himself

The reconciliation achieved in the person of Christ is at once objective and subjective

(i) The restoration of the human mind to truth with God

The breach between humanity's idea of God and the truth of God - the grasping of a lie

The renewal of the human mind from within and below through the incarnation

(ii) Reconciliation involves subjective as well as objective union with God - 'noetic' and 'ontic' union

The 'noetic' relation between God and man in Christ was twofold

The realising of oneness of mind and heart between man and God in the life of Jesus

The hypostatic union brought to fulfilment in the final oneness on the cross

(iii) A comparison with Socrates: Jesus died to achieve union between truth and being

The establishment of the human mind on the truth of God and the humanising of man

(f) Reconciliation means 'Immanuel', God with us**(i) Reconciliation is not automatic but always personal in its encounter with us****(ii) God with us means we with God, our adoption into the communion of the divine life**

The assurance of God with us - the dawning already of the kingdom and its fellowship

(g) Reconciliation is cosmic**(i) The whole creation is involved in reconciliation - a cosmic peace****(ii) Reconciliation is identical with the living person of Christ**

The cross and its reconciliation are the ultimate secret of human history

Chapter Six**ATONEMENT AS REDEMPTION**

171

The meaning of 'redeem', 'redemption'

Lutron, ransom: *lutrousthai*, redeem

Luō, destroy, release

Lutrōsis, *apolutrōsis*, redemption

Apolutrōsis and *kipper*, *goel*, *padah*

Peripoiēsis, possession

1 The mighty act of redemption

177

Redemption and the Spirit**(a) The relation of Pentecost to the cross**

The atonement fully completed only in the pouring out of the Spirit by Christ

(b) Redemption is the fulfilment of the covenant

(c) Redemption is a present possession through the Spirit

(d) The relation of redemption through the Spirit to the body

2 *The range of redemption*

181

(a) Who did Christ die for? – the question of ‘limited atonement’

(i) Whom did Christ represent in his incarnation and in his death?

(1) What is the relation of the incarnation to the atonement?

The inseparability of atonement and incarnation and of their range of representation

(2) What is the relation between the redemptive work of Christ and election?

God’s election cannot be separated from Christ and is essentially corporate in him

(ii) What is the relation between the death of Jesus on the cross, and the Father in heaven?

It is impossible to divide the deity and the humanity of Christ or Christ from the Father

(iii) What is the nature of the efficacy of the atoning death of Christ on the cross?

The distinction between ‘sufficiency’ and ‘efficacy’ in the death of Christ

The concept of irresistible grace and absolute divine causality – does atonement flow from the will or from the nature of God?

The ‘possibility’ of salvation – the alternative of Arminianism

The rationalism of both universalism and limited atonement

(b) Positive affirmations on the range of the atonement

(i) Christ’s death for all is an inescapable reality

(ii) Pentecost is part of atonement

The actualising of the atonement through the Spirit’s incorporation of us into Christ

The communion of those incorporated into Christ is the subjectification of atonement

(iii) The community of the covenant – the church as the middle term

The community of the covenant is reconstituted in Christ for all mankind

The twofold range of the covenant, universal, yet particular reaching out to the universal

The meaning of baptism

A threefold ingrafting into Christ

3 *The eschatological perspective of redemption*

193

(a) Redemption in the gospel of Luke

(b) The whole of creation is involved in redemption

The vast cosmic significance of the cross

Two early church emphases

(c) Redemption affects all humanity and relates us to the whole of creation

(i) Reconciliation with the fabric of the universe

(ii) Reconciliation between all humanity

Reconciliation must reach out to the ends of the universe

Chapter Seven**THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST**

201

*Introduction – the biblical concept of resurrection***(a) The teaching of the Old Testament**

- (i) Restoration through undergirding covenant faithfulness
- (ii) Resurrection primarily corporate
- (iii) The raising up of a promised saviour
- (iv) The application of 'goel' to God
- (v) The later concept of a double resurrection

(b) The teaching of the New Testament**The two main words for resurrection, 'anistēmī' and 'egeirō'****Old Testament nuances behind the New Testament teaching**

- (i) The raising up and appointing of prophet, king and priest
- (ii) The miraculous raising up of seed out of the barren womb or the dry ground
- (iii) The resurrection and full installation of Christ as the Messiah
- (iv) The universal significance of the resurrection of Jesus
The resurrection of Jesus carries with it our resurrection as individuals

1 The resurrection and the person of Jesus Christ

209

(a) The resurrection is inseparable from the person of the incarnate Son

The engagement of the Son with our darkness and the attack of evil on his person

The life of the Son in our condition means a humiliation and an exaltation, not one after the other, but one as the obverse of the other

(i) 'Christ clothed with his promises'

The integrity of person, word and work in Christ

The person of Christ, clothed with his crucifixion and resurrection, is the great paschal mystery of our salvation

- (ii) The resurrection is not just the completion of our salvation but part of the very being and person of Christ as mediator

(b) The resurrection of Jesus Christ as passive and active**(i) The resurrection as passive – Jesus was raised**

- (1) The resurrection as the 'amen' of justification, God's 'satisfaction' in the Son
- (2) The proper place of a doctrine of 'satisfaction' in the atonement

(ii) The resurrection as active – Jesus rose

- (1) Jesus triumphed over the grave by his sinlessness – he had no sin for death to hold him
- (2) The resurrection is the holding firm of the hypostatic union through death and hell
- (3) Jesus the new Adam who breathes life into others, and heads a new creation
- (4) As passive and active the resurrection corresponds to anhypostasia and enhypostasia

(c) The relation of the resurrection to the virgin birth of Christ

- (i) The veiling and the unveiling of God in the life of Jesus
- (ii) Redemption and creation come together in the resurrection
- (iii) The resurrection reveals that the virgin birth was the birth of the almighty Creator-Word
- (iv) The correspondence of the resurrection to the nature of the person of Christ

2 *The resurrection and the atoning work of Christ*

222

(a) **The resurrection and justification**

The relation between forgiveness and resurrection

The resurrection is forgiveness actualised - the healing of the paralytic

(i) The resurrection is the fulfilment of justification

A purely forensic doctrine of justification bypasses the resurrection, and is empty without an active sharing in Christ's righteousness

Justification and resurrection stand or fall together

(ii) Questions for the Protestant doctrine of justification

(1) Without a real union with the risen Christ here and now is there not a dichotomy between creation and redemption?

(2) Without some doctrine of realised justification is there not a dualism between God and the world, and a forgetting of Pentecost?

The critical question of bodily resurrection

(b) **The resurrection and reconciliation**

(i) The resurrection is the fulfilment of reconciliation

The fulfilment of the steadfast love of God and the answering trust of the son of man

Apart from the resurrection reconciliation would be hollow

(ii) The fulfilment of Christ's 'I am' – eternal reconciliation

(iii) Corollaries of the resurrection

(1) Sonship with Christ - adoption to become children of God

The exaltation of man to be a partaker of the life and love of God

(2) The risen Jesus is the living union of the truth of God and the

answering truth of man

The resurrection completion in Jesus' humanity of knowledge of God

(3) The final pledge of objective knowledge of God in Jesus Christ

The relations of man with God in being and knowing are healed and fully established

(c) **The resurrection and redemption**

(i) The resurrection is the redemption of the whole human being

(ii) The resurrection accords with the nature of the creator-Word made flesh, and is therefore sheer re-creative miracle, shattering the bonds of death

The astounding nature of Christ and the consistency of the resurrection with his person

(iii) A comparison of creation and resurrection – the parallels

(1) Creation can be observed once in being, but not the process or event of creation itself

(2) Creation and resurrection are not to be thought of as interruptions of the natural order

(3) The resurrection can be observed once it has come into being, but it cannot be apprehended within the framework of the old creation

(iv) The resurrection is the affirmation and restoration of humanity

(1) Man is now man, and humanity is now genuine humanity

The resurrection is the affirmation of the reality of creation and creaturely being

The early church emphasis on '*physis*' and thinking according to the real nature of things

(2) The empty tomb - resurrection that is not bodily is not resurrection

(3) Jesus' life as man before and after the resurrection

How are we to understand the reality of Jesus' risen humanity?

Chapter Eight**THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION EVENT** 243**1 *The resurrection is a new type of event*** 243**An event in history but one going beyond it into a new creation**

The undoing and redemption of the past into a new order of being

(a) The resurrection is a real event in space and time

Atonement and redemption are empty without resurrection in space and time

The resurrection is an event in historical time, which cannot be captured in its framework

(b) The resurrection is a new kind of event in space and time

The resurrection remains continuous live happening that does not decay into the past

The baffling nature of the resurrection as new historical happening

The resurrection involves apocalypse and the transformation of the old creation

The resurrection means the redemption of space and time and not the end of space and time

2 *The problem of how we interpret historical events* 248**(a) Interpreting ordinary historical events****(i) Freedom and necessity in historical events**

The distinction between causal necessity and factual necessity

(ii) History is the interweaving of natural processes with human intention

Historical events need to be interpreted in terms of the human intention behind events

(b) Interpreting the resurrection – theological factors**(i) The resurrection needs to be interpreted in accordance with the nature of the person involved**

The resurrection needs to be interpreted both historically and theologically

Because Jesus is still alive we can penetrate into the historical happening of Jesus' resurrection in a way not possible with any other event

Access into the historical happening of Jesus through the communion of the Spirit

(ii) The resurrection needs to be interpreted in accordance with its nature as the redemption of time

Resurrection is redemption 'under the law' yet 'apart from law' - within 'nomistic' human existence but out of it

In our nomistic existence law prevents lawlessness but imprisons us in our inability to obey it

The resurrection redeems us from nomistic time into the new time of the new creation

3 *Positive implications of the resurrection* 255**(a) In the risen Christ, there is a hypostatic union between eternity and new time hidden from us by the ascension**

(b) The church lives in two times, the time of this passing world and the time of the new creation

The church is sent as a servant to live the life of the new creation within the old

- (i) The language of apocalyptic, the new seen through the language of the old
As the old man perishes day by day, so the new man is renewed day by day
- (ii) The millennium time of the already inaugurated kingdom
Millennium time is hidden from sight, but seen by faith and present in the eucharist
- (iii) The need to think christologically, to hold together the two times
The concept of a 1000 year earthly reign fails to recognise the majesty of the risen Christ

(c) The church lives 'between the times' – between resurrection and final advent**(d) As in the days of his earthly life Jesus waits for the 'hour' of final consummation**

The church is commanded to lift up its head in joy, for its 'redemption is drawing near'

Chapter Nine**THE ASCENSION AND PAROUSIA OF JESUS CHRIST 265***The ascension of Jesus Christ***1 The language of ascension 265**

- (a) *Anabainō*, go up, ascend
- (b) *Kathizō*, sit
- (c) *Analambanō*, take up
- (d) *Hupsoō*, lift up

2 The threefold office of Christ in ascension 270**(a) The ascension of Christ the king****(b) The ascension of Christ the royal priest****Christ is both apostle and priest in final reality****The eternal efficacy of Christ's priesthood in heaven**

- (i) Christ's endless self-oblation
- (ii) Christ's eternal intercession or advocacy for us
Christ is the eternal leader of our intercession and himself our one true prayer
Christ the mediator of eucharistic worship and prayer
- (iii) Christ's eternal benediction – the blessing of his people in the gift of the Spirit
Christ's blessing of the church in its participation in his royal priesthood

(c) The ascension of Christ the prophet

- (i) Christ continues his prophetic ministry through his Spirit in the church
The proclamation of Christ to all nations – the Word of God in act and human word

- (ii) Christ reigns through his word: the relation between the church's ministry and Christ the head
The ministry of word and sacrament within the church
- (iii) Christ's own ministry in the continuing ministry of the church

3 The nature of the ascension event

281

(a) How is the event of the ascension related to space and time?

- (i) The question of the 'Calvinist extra'
The difficulties of rejecting the 'Calvinist extra'
The danger of compromising the humanity of Jesus
The truth in the Lutheran insistence on a real incarnation
- (ii) The need to have a 'relational' view of space and time
 - (1) God exists as God and man exists as man
 - (2) The duality of fallen space-time and redeemed space-time
- (iii) The ascension must be thought out in relation to space and time and yet as beyond space and time
- (iv) Jesus Christ is the place where God and man meet in space and time
As the incarnation is the meeting of man and God in man's place, so the ascension is the meeting of man and God in God's place

(b) Two points we have to think together

- (i) Jesus ascended from man's place to God's place
 - (1) The difficulty of our abstract notions of space, and the need for a new understanding
Space and time are relational to active agents
 - (2) Man's place is defined by the nature and activity of man, and God's place is defined by the nature and activity of God
 - (3) The ascension is 'bounded' at our end but open at God's end – the reversal of perspective in Byzantine art
 - (4) In the ascension Jesus leaves us in the mode of man's presence that he might be with us in the mode of God's presence
- (ii) By his ascension Jesus establishes man in man's place in space and time
 - (1) The ascension sends us back to the historical Jesus
 - (2) We cannot know God by transcending space and time
 - (3) We know the risen and ascended Jesus only through the historical and crucified Jesus
 - (4) Only through the Spirit can Christ be historically absent and actually present

(c) The material implications of the doctrine of the ascension

- (i) The exaltation of man into the life of God
The preservation of human nature and creaturely being
- (ii) The establishment on the apostolic tradition of a church in history
The establishing of scripture and the basic patterns of church life
The structures of the church must be essentially 'open' structures
- (iii) The heavenly rule of the ascended Christ is the key to world history
History is to be seen in the light of Christ who makes all things work for his purpose
Prayer is the link between world history and the intercession of Christ in heaven

4 The resurrection and the ascension

298

The triumph of light over darkness: is the resurrection body transfused with light?

The disciples' fleeting glimpses of Jesus in his resurrection body

(a) 'Spiritual body' means more body and not less body

(b) The reality of Christ's resurrection body can only be discerned through the Spirit

The sacraments are the pledges of participation in Christ's risen humanity

5 *The ascension and the parousia of Jesus Christ*

301

The one parousia of Christ

Christ's parousia means the coming-and-real-presence of God in the flesh

The New Testament understanding of the one parousia of Christ

(a) The ascension creates an eschatological pause 'in the midst of the parousia'

The distinction and holding apart of 'two advents'

The kingdom is inaugurated but waits to be manifested

The time created for proclamation of the gospel

(b) The ascension creates a threefold relation to Christ

(i) Historical relation to the historical Jesus Christ

(ii) Sacramental relation to the crucified and risen Jesus Christ

(1) The sacraments are part of space and time but signs of the new creation

(2) The sacraments are the signs given to accompany the scriptures

The patience of Christ and the holding back of his power

(3) The sacraments are the 'miraculous signs' of our participation in Christ

(iii) Eschatological relation to the ascended and advent Jesus Christ

(1) Eschatology means the act of God within space and time, and not just at the end

(2) The biblical view is teleological as well as eschatological, fulfilling time as well as ending it

(3) The parousia will be the unveiling of the perfected reality of Christ

(4) The twofold relation in eschatology, between old and new, and present and future

The concept of a 'delayed advent'

(c) The range and reach of eschatology

(i) The cosmic range of eschatology

The whole of creation is gathered up and renewed in Christ

(ii) The corporate aspect of eschatology

The distance of the ascension and the nearness of the advent

The church must continually put off the old and put on the new

(iii) The individual aspect of eschatology

Servants whose true being is hid with Christ in God

Nourished by word and sacrament, until Christ comes again

Chapter Ten

THE BIBLICAL WITNESS TO JESUS CHRIST:

THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT AND THE CREATION OF APOSTOLIC TESTIMONY AND GOSPEL

315

1 *The Apostolate*

316

Christ makes the apostolic witness to him his own self-witness

(a) The Hebrew concept of 'shaliach' or authorised representative
Jesus Christ is the unique 'shaliach' of God in word and deed

(b) The apostles are the 'sheluchim' or personal representatives of Christ
Christ's recommissioning of the apostles to be his representatives

2 The gift of the Holy Spirit

320

(a) The Spirit makes the transition from Christ's self-witness to apostolic witness

The coming of the Spirit as Christ's 'shaliach' is the coming of Christ

(b) Through the Spirit the apostolic witness becomes the foundation of the church

Through the Spirit Christ is present himself in the apostolic *kērygma* – the relation between word and Spirit

Through the Spirit of truth, the disciples are fully instructed and empowered in Christ

(c) The Spirit could only come to reveal Christ after the resurrection and ascension

(i) The bringing of the apostles to understanding

(1) The coming of the Spirit is essential to revelation, enabling the disciples to receive him

(2) Revelation could only be partial until the coming of the Interpreter

(ii) The Christ who is known through the Spirit is the same historical Jesus himself acting and speaking to his people

(iii) The twofold act of revelation is now completed by Christ in the apostolic mind

(iv) Pentecost could only take place after the completion of atonement and reconciliation

(d) Pentecost is not a new revelation but the final unfolding of the one revelation of Christ

3 The apostolic gospel

329

(a) The revelation of Christ was grounded and earthed in the apostolic gospel

The unrepeatable event of Christ becomes eschatological event in human testimony

(b) The apostolic gospel is Christ's full and final revelation of himself

The unique enshrining of the mind of Christ in the apostolic gospel

The apostles are the specially inspired witness to the one revelation of Christ

The apostolic word joined to Christ by the Spirit to become word of Christ

(c) The Gospels and Epistles together make up the apostolic gospel and neither can be interpreted apart from the other

The unfolding of a Christian view of the finished work of Christ

4 The apostolic tradition and the New Testament

333

(a) The apostolic tradition is given permanent form in the New Testament

Apostolic scripture is so conjoined to the divine Word as to be the written word of God to man

The New Testament acknowledged as the authentic apostolic tradition

(b) The relation between the Word made flesh and the written word

(i) The relation of the written word to the living Word is like that of the flesh to the incarnate Word

(ii) The relation of the written word to the living Word is unlike that of the flesh to the incarnate Word

The sacramental and eschatological relation between the written and the incarnate Word – election and judgement

The sacramental participation of scripture in the whole divine-human Word of Christ

(iii) The communication of properties between the written and the incarnate Word

The guiding analogy of the relation between the divine and human natures of Christ

(iv) The basic text is the obedient humanity of Jesus Christ

The New Testament is the inspired secondary text

Chapter Eleven**THE ONE CHURCH OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST**

341

A THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

342

The church is grounded and rooted in the eternal purpose of God in Christ

The three forms of the church: preparatory, new in Christ and eternal in the new creation

The mission of the church to proclaim by word and life the reconciling love of God

1 The people of God under the old covenant

343

The earthly beginning of the church in Adam

The calling of the church with Abraham and its establishment at Sinai
Israel constituted as prophet of God bearing his oracles and the promise of the Messiah

Israel the preparatory form of the church waiting for fulfilment

(a) Israel the chosen people of God**(b) Israel the servant of the Lord****(c) Israel the bearer of the Messiah**

The transition to the new covenant only through the death and resurrection of the Messiah

The Christian church now grafted on to Israel and part of the race of Abraham

2 Jesus Christ and his messianic community 349

The coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus

The kingdom and the people of God concentrated in and around the Messiah

The nature and mission of Jesus as Messiah determine the form and structure of the church

(a) The rooting of the church in the person and ministry of the historical Jesus

(i) The essential and constitutive nature of Jesus' human and individual ministry

(ii) The basis of the new Israel in the incorporation of the disciples into his messianic mission

(iii) The indissoluble bond of Messiah and people in the inauguration of the new covenant

(iv) The death and resurrection of the Messiah inaugurating the new economy

(b) The rebirth of the church in the body and Spirit of the risen Jesus

(i) The pouring out of the Spirit to breathe quickening life into the church

(ii) The church rooted in Christ to participate in his life and his messianic mission and ministry

Jesus' initiation, consecration and then recommissioning of the disciples into his mission

Jesus' intention to leave a ministry patterned on his and based on the apostles and Pentecost

(iii) The presence of Father, Son and Spirit in the ministry of Christ and in that of the church

(iv) Christ the only absolute and proper minister of the church before God

The ministry of the apostles and the church shares in the one ministry of Christ in his body

B THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH 358

The church is part of the creed and an essential part of faith in the gospel

1 The church is the work of the three divine persons 359

The grounding of the church in a threefold communion

(a) The church is the universal family of God the Father sharing sonship with the Son

(b) The church is the community of the reconciled, finding its life in union with Jesus Christ

(c) The church is the communion of saints living in communion with God through the Holy Spirit

2 The church is the body of Christ 362

The twofold meaning of the 'body of Christ' – the whole Christ and the body of the head

The whole life and essence of the church is to be found in Christ alone

The church's relation to Christ determined by incarnation, atonement and Pentecost

(a) The church is rooted in the incarnate Son – it is the church of the Word made flesh

The church is rooted in Christ's being as individual and corporate, particular and universal

(b) The church is grounded in the atonement – it is the body of the crucified and risen Christ

The church's relation to Christ determined by substitution, atonement and incorporation

(c) The church is united to Christ through the communion of the Spirit – it is the body of the ascended Lord, the head of all things visible and invisible

(i) The twofold incorporation, of incarnation and the baptism of the Spirit, is the basis of the church as the body of Christ

Body and bride, united to and yet still distanced from Christ

(ii) Similarity and dissimilarity between the hypostatic union in Christ and the church's union with him

The difference between Christ's sinless union with fallen humanity and the church's union with him

The church is at once holy as part of Christ and stands with sinners needing forgiveness

(iii) The triangular relation of the church on earth to the historical, ascended and advent Christ

3 *The life and mission of the church*

373

The being of the church in Christ and its nature as love

The church's being and nature in Christ inseparable from its mission of love

(a) The church is a communion of love

The Spirit is God in his freedom to be present to creation in the overflow of the divine love

The life of the church is indwelling the love of God in Christ

Christ's life of servant love the pattern for the church

The church can only fulfil its mission by being a fellowship of reconciliation

(b) The church is the community informed with the mind of Christ

Reconciliation and transformation in mind

Theology primarily the function of the church - learning the mind of Christ with others

The discipline of theology - bringing the church's understanding under the word of God that it may be conformed to Christ

(c) The church is sent out into the world as the servant and herald of Christ

The church's ministry as body is correlative to Christ's ministry as head

The servant pointing to Christ and not to itself

4 *The attributes of the church*

380

The attributes of the church are first and foremost attributes of Christ himself

(a) The oneness or unity of the church

(i) The oneness of the church goes back through union with Christ to the triune oneness of God

(ii) The oneness of the church is grounded in the incarnation and atonement

The reconciliation demanded and renewed through participation in holy communion

- (iii) The oneness of the church derives likewise from the one Spirit of God
- (iv) The unity of the church is both bodily and spiritual
- (v) The unity of the church on earth and in heaven

(b) The holiness of the church

God's hallowing of himself in the midst of his people

- (i) The 'holiness' of the church is its participation in the unique holiness of God
- (ii) The holiness of the church is its sharing in the self-sanctification of Christ
- (iii) The holiness of the church is its participation through the Spirit in Christ's holiness
 - (1) The holiness and sanctification of the church is already complete in Christ
 - (2) The church has no holiness in itself and must continually die and rise with Christ

(c) The catholicity of the church

- (i) The catholicity of the church is its participation in the fullness and universality of God
- (ii) The identity, continuity and universality of the church in all the world and in all ages
- (iii) The universal mission of redemption reaching out to incorporate all humanity
- (iv) Catholicity in understanding the fullness of Christ
 - Christian faith primarily the faith of the one body – the mind of Christ unfolded in the Spirit
- (v) The church known only through faith and catholicised only by Christ

(d) The apostolicity of the church

Apostolicity the determining factor behind the attributes of the church

Apostolic church and apostolic succession means continuity in word and deed with Christ

- (i) Apostolic means the church created in the apostolic sending of Christ from the Father and the apostles from Christ
 - The church's double relation to Christ: founded historically on the apostles and supernaturally through the Spirit
 - The outward and inward form of the covenant and apostolic succession in which all participate
- (ii) Apostolic means grounded on the unrepeatable foundation of the apostles
 - Apostolic means following the apostles in both doctrine and ordinances
 - The threefold apostolic foundation: canon of scripture, rule of faith, and apostolic ministry
 - The inseparable intertwining of apostolic ministry with apostolic scripture and the rule of faith
- (iii) Apostolic means scripture as the source and norm of the church's life

Chapter Twelve

JESUS CHRIST THE FIRST AND THE LAST:

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE GOSPEL 401

1 New Testament eschatology and its indispensable place in the church 401

(a) The historical weakness of eschatology in the church

(b) The nature and roots of New Testament eschatology

- (i) The prophetic view of the kingdom of God
- (ii) The Old Testament emphasis on the future has now been shifted to the present
- (iii) The New Testament kingdom is both present and future
- (iv) The prophetic view of a kingdom hidden until the time of its fulfilment

(c) The coming of the kingdom in Jesus but the holding apart of final judgement

The mystery of evil

The church must remain an eschatological community, proclaiming the new creation

(d) The reign of Christ and the kingdom of God - the biblical tension of present and future

(e) The concept of time in the New Testament and the nature of the eschatological tension

- (i) The tension between old time as we know it and the new time of the new creation
- (ii) The twofold nature of the eschatological tension, between eternity and time, and between new time and old time
- (iii) Apocalypse is the unveiling of the hidden reality of the new creation in Jesus Christ
- (iv) The key to history is the lamb of God who must reign until his enemies are under his feet

2 The sacraments and eschatology 413

(a) Between the times, the sacraments of baptism and holy communion

- (i) The correspondence of the sacraments to the twofold tension of Christian eschatology
- (ii) Baptism is the primary eschatological act, whose reality in Christ waits to be fully revealed
- (iii) The provision of the eucharist for the renewal of faith and recurring confirmation of baptism

The last supper designed to form an unbreakable union with Christ cemented on the cross

The meaning of Jesus' parables and teaching, shepherding and feeding the people

- (iv) Standing in the new creation and sharing the power of Christ's resurrection

The converging of the passover and covenant meals of the Old Testament and the messianic meals of Sinai and Galilee

The eucharist spans past and future, joining the church to the death and advent of Christ

(b) The sacraments and the eschatological relation

- (i) The eschatological relation is not an easy one – the sacraments' twin emphasis
- (ii) The eucharist points to an eschatological fullness still to be unveiled
The church must continually transcend herself and her forms in the new creation
- (iii) The wholeness of Christ is a matter of eschatological expectation and not of temporal repetition
We walk by faith and not by sight, until Christ returns and we see him as he is

3 Christ the first and the last, the hope of the world

424

(a) The differences between apostolic eschatology, Greek idealism and Jewish eschatology

- (i) The contrast between the eschatology of the apostolic Church and Greek idealism
Hebrew and Greek: the difference of language
 - (1) The general contrast between the Hebrew concern with dynamic action and the Greek concern with abstract conceptions and logical relations
The mutual contribution of Hebrew, Greek and Latin
 - (2) Differences in the conception of election – personal categories and abstract determinism
 - (3) The difference between the Hebrew 'eternal end' which enters time and history, and the Greek timeless and 'ideal end'
- (ii) The contrast between Christian eschatology and late Judaistic eschatology – the telescoping together of the two ages of Judaism
The turning point between the old age and the new and the dawning of the new age

(b) The main features of apostolic eschatology

- (i) The basic fact of the person of Christ, the risen Lord ascended to kingly rule
- (ii) The one *parousia* of Christ, from incarnation to final advent in glory
- (iii) The two great moments of the death-and-resurrection of Christ, and the final apocalypse in glory
- (iv) Between the moments, the ascension and the presence of Christ through the Spirit
 - (1) The ascended Lord can be known only through the historical Jesus
 - (2) The ascended Lord is known in the historical Jesus, but only through the Spirit,
 - (3) Between the times Jesus is known through historical witness, by word and Spirit
- (v) The church as the eschatological community reaching out to the age to come
 - (1) The tension between the new and the old – hope and the expectation of Christ's coming
 - (2) The tension between the present and the future – faith is inherently eschatological
- (vi) The church must live by being transformed in Christ and therefore in tension with the forms of this world
- (vii) The suffering servant with the song of indescribable joy and triumph in Jesus Christ

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In these very readable and accessible lectures T.F. Torrance continues from the point he had reached in *Incarnation* at the approach to the cross. In *Atonement* he begins with the meaning of the cross and with thorough biblical-theological interpretation takes us through the great New Testament themes: atonement, reconciliation, redemption, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Spirit, apostolic foundation of the church, high-priesthood and heavenly reign of Christ, doctrine of the church and its mission, the final coming of Christ. At every point Torrance sees the inter-connectedness of all Christian doctrine and brings out the full significance of the great events of Jesus' life from the cross to Pentecost. These lectures demonstrate the full impact and importance for the church of the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ portrayed in *Incarnation*. Rich in biblical depth and theological penetration the lectures are moving, challenging and indeed thrilling in the freshness of their approach and overriding sense of the fullness of the love of God in Christ that reaches out through the Spirit to the final redemption of all creation.

The purpose of the introduction

The purpose is:

- (a) to explain the relation of *Atonement* to *Incarnation* and of the work and person of Jesus Christ
- (b) to summarise the theology of these lectures on atonement and outline their leading themes
- (c) to select and outline major points of challenge and fruitfulness in Torrance's theology.

Readers are referred to the introduction to *Incarnation* for an account of the nature and purpose of the Torrance dogmatics lectures, the leading features of their theology in general, and an explanation of the text of the lectures and the process of editing them.

Since this introduction as a summary of Torrance's theology of Christ's person and work is rather full, there are two ways in which readers may wish to use it. They can read through it for a general overview, and they can also read each section before reading the relevant chapter(s) in the lectures.

A The relation between *Incarnation* and *Atonement*: Christology and Soteriology

Atonement is the sequel to *Incarnation*, where the theme is *the person and life of Jesus Christ*, with the emphasis falling upon *who* Jesus is and the way that determines the significance of his life. In *Atonement* the theme is *the person and work of Jesus Christ*, with the emphasis falling upon his *work* of salvation understood in the light of who he is. Together the two books comprise T.F. Torrance's lectures at New College, Edinburgh on the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

The concept of the person of Christ and of salvation in his person

The concept of the person of Christ is central to Christian theology, just as the phrase 'in Christ' is to the New Testament. The person of Christ is the whole reality of his person, the fact that in his person he is the eternal Son of God and yet also son of man. His person as son of man, as a human person, is not different from his person as the Son of God. The reality of his human person as Jesus is therefore not to be understood as a second person, in addition to his person as eternal Son. As human person his reality is not to be found *apart from*, but *in* his reality as the person of the Son. It is *in* the person of the Son that he is also a fully individual human person.

This is the New Testament 'mystery of Christ' explored in *Incarnation*, the reality of the whole Christ known to faith, the miracle of the incarnation, that the Son of God is now man. In his person he is true God and true man, bearing in his person all the riches of God for us and at the same time all the riches of true humanity. In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and he is our righteousness, sanctification and redemption, to use biblical language. His humanity, his flesh and blood to use the language of John 6, is the bread of life. In his person, in his one person, there are contained all the treasures of salvation – in him, inside his person and never outside it. Jesus Christ is and contains our salvation in himself, in his person, but as Calvin argued this is no use to us as long he remains outside of us, in a manner distant from us until we are united to him through faith, incorporated into him by the Spirit. Our salvation is and remains 'in Christ', to use the oft-repeated and pivotal Pauline phrase, and becomes accessible to us only through union with him through the Spirit.

Our salvation is in the person of Christ, but the person of Christ includes in itself all that he has done for us and worked out in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. Hence the person of Christ properly understood includes within itself what he has done and the whole

Christ is his person and everything which he has achieved for our salvation in the human nature which he wears for us.

Christology and Soteriology, person and work not to be separated

In Christian theology the doctrine of Christ has traditionally been thought of in terms of his person and his work, with the doctrine of the person of Christ, who he is, being known as 'Christology' and the doctrine of the work of Christ, what he did, being known as 'Soteriology'. Together Christology and Soteriology make up the doctrine of Jesus Christ and in the nature of the case the two belong together and are not to be understood apart from each other. Christology may be thought of as the doctrine of *the person of Christ in his work* and Soteriology as the doctrine of *the work of Christ in his person*.

One whole Christ from birth to ascension and a contrast of emphases in Christology and Soteriology

There is another difference between the two. Although Jesus Christ is one whole Christ comprising person and work from birth to ascension, the emphasis in Christology falls on the incarnation since that was the event in which the eternal Son became the man Jesus and lived out his life on earth. The nature of the becoming man and the nature and significance of the person of Jesus in his life and work are central. In Soteriology the emphasis falls more on the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and his sending of the Spirit, since those are the climactic events in which he achieved salvation for humankind.

A further point of contrast between Christology and Soteriology is that in Christology the focus falls naturally on the incarnation as the *beginning* of salvation, while in Soteriology the focus falls on the events at the end of Jesus' life as its *completion*. In both person and work are involved, for the incarnation as God becoming man is already God in the person of Christ acting for our salvation. It is the eternal Son assuming human nature into unity with his own person and this is already the beginning of the sanctification of man and the elevation of humanity in Jesus into fellowship with God.

The hypostatic union is the heart of both Christology and Soteriology

For Torrance, the 'hypostatic union', the union of God and man in the *hypostasis* or person of the Son, is the heart of salvation and its unbreakable linchpin. He who is the eternal Son of God, of one being with the Father, is he who is now also man and the fact that

the same person who is fully and truly God is now fully and truly man, means that his person is and constitutes in itself (or in himself) the union of God and humanity. The same person stands on the side of God and on the side of humanity. The same person is at once God and man. In his one person, therefore, God and man, God and all humanity, are now irrevocably and eternally united. God and man can now no more be separated from one another in Christ than the person of Christ can be undone, or the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection be reversed.

The hypostatic union is one dynamic event from incarnation to ascension

For Torrance it is also important that the hypostatic union can only be understood dynamically. The union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ, while magnificently and truly articulated as 'two natures in one person' at the Council of Chalcedon of 451 AD, is not to be interpreted statically. It is event, a becoming, the action of God in beginning and continuing to be a human being. The action of God in becoming man begins with seedless conception and slow embryonic growth in the womb of Mary. It continues with birth at Bethlehem and the gradual growth of Jesus in wisdom and stature to adulthood. Then throughout the life of Jesus the union of God and man in him is maintained and worked out in the teeth of temptation and all the assaults of evil which attempt to tear it apart, to divide Jesus' humanity from his deity, tempting him to use his power as God to escape from being man. Holding firm in Jesus' life, the hypostatic union is steadfastly carried forward to the cross and maintained under the full judgement of God on our sin and the final assault of evil on his person, and so it emerges triumphant, unscathed and complete in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

The hypostatic union is ongoing event worked out through death into new creation

The hypostatic union is thus to be understood as an ongoing event, which had its beginning in Mary and at Bethlehem, but had to grow and be worked out and maintained throughout the life of Jesus. It had to achieve its end of gathering sinners into solidarity with himself and then of bearing their sin and dying for them in lonely substitution and representation on the cross. Under the judgement of God, in which he the judge took his own divine judgement into his human heart and bore it, he maintained faith in God and kept his hypostatic union firm, so that it emerged as enduring reality in the new creation on the other side of death.

Soteriology as Christology worked out, person and work as one whole Christ

It can thus be seen that Soteriology is Christology worked out in the life of Jesus. The Son of God became son of man in order as God and as man to achieve salvation for us in his own person and humanity. A person is living person, acting person, living event in history, and therefore person is not simply bare person but action and work also, person in work and in action. As living person, Jesus in his life is the working out of our salvation in his own person and human life. Person is the person doing the work and the work becomes and is part of his person. The person is the union of God and man, and the work is the working out and living out of that union down into death and up into resurrection where it becomes eternally living event. In the nature of the case, therefore Christology and Soteriology, the person and the work of Christ cannot be separated. Christology issues in Soteriology and the hypostatic union is not the union of two static natures in one person, but living person who is God acting and man acting, one person performing the work of salvation. Together, person and work make up the one whole Jesus Christ. Christology becomes clothed with Soteriology, just as 'Jesus is clothed with his gospel' (to use the language quoted by Torrance from Calvin), and Soteriology has its meaning and dynamic in the person of its agent. The argument of *Atonement* flows uninterruptedly out of the argument of *Incarnation*.

B The leading themes of Torrance's Soteriology

Since the leading features of Torrance's theology have already been summarised in the introduction to *Incarnation*, the purpose here will be to focus on the themes which are more specific to Soteriology and to outline the central structure of the argument as a guide to understanding the whole.

The approach to the atonement

The mystery of atonement – we can only start from the decisive new act of God in Christ

As he approaches the atonement and the cross as presented in the New Testament, Torrance is aware from the outset that the meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ is one that we cannot penetrate by human reason or by any theories of atonement as such. There is no logical relation between the death of Jesus at Calvary and the forgiveness of our sins. The infinite and holy mystery of the cross is one in which in

the passion and death of Christ on the cross God has intervened decisively on our behalf to establish our lives on an entirely new basis. We can only begin from the new basis, from the fact that it has come about in the death and resurrection of Jesus and we can only follow him in what he has accomplished for us. For Torrance we cannot think our way *into* the cross of Christ but only *out from* it. We may understand it only from the resurrection side of it, by *metanoia*, by repentance and change of mind, by following Christ and thinking our way *from* it. The infinite mystery of atonement is something which he has accomplished within his own person and act and which transcends any merely rational explanation and outstrips any Old Testament prefiguration.

The Old Testament the essential preparation to understanding the atonement in Jesus

Even though the person and act of Jesus far transcends it, the Old Testament prefiguration is the indispensable preparation to understanding what happened in him. Without the long training by God of Israel in the necessary concepts and categories of thought, we could not even begin to understand the mystery of atonement in his person. New Testament images, metaphors, ways of thinking and language are all based in and drawn from the Old Testament and therefore Torrance begins his account with tracing the roots of New Testament language and thought in the Old. The death of Jesus as a ransom and sacrifice is the fulfilment of the covenant and of Old Testament sacrifice, at once of the day of atonement and of the passover in a new covenant and covenant meal. The eternal priesthood of Jesus, for which he was consecrated on earth and continues in heaven, is the fulfilment of the full Old Testament concept of priesthood, of the priesthood of Moses and the priesthood of Aaron, the priesthood of the word and the priesthood of obedient witness, the act of God and the act of man.

The atonement is ultimately inconceivable outside the person and act of Jesus

What Jesus accomplished within his own person could not have been foreseen or imagined in advance. It was inconceivable that here in this living self-offering made once for all Jesus should do what all the Old Testament acts of sacrifice were unable to accomplish, let alone that it should be God himself making atonement, God acting from the side of God and from the side of man, as Judge and judged, priest and sacrifice in one. The person of Jesus Christ the mediator holds together in a living synthesis in himself all the Old Testament images and prefigurings of atonement. In the unity of his person and work

atonement is something which Jesus Christ has done and which cannot be imagined outside his person and act. Obedient Christian theology therefore can only follow Christ in his word and act, in his word and deed, knowing him to be the reality we seek to understand, a reality which was not there until he did it, which was inconceivable until he did it and which no-one but he could have done.

Concepts of atonement transformed and held together in Christ

Torrance's approach to the doctrine of the atonement is one in which he begins each chapter with careful biblical interpretation and spends time examining the meaning and context of biblical words, particularly of New Testament words and concepts in the light of their Old Testament foundation and background. Critical though the Old Testament is for understanding atonement in the New, it is the person and work of Jesus which are all-determinative for establishing its meaning, since what he said and did gives new meaning to the Old Testament concepts. Torrance takes two sayings of Jesus, 'This is the new covenant in my blood' and 'The son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many' and uses them to structure his opening account. From his six chapters on the atonement, the following points may be highlighted as central and outlining the heart of his teaching.

1 The theology of the atonement

(a) Atonement is the fulfilment of the covenant: the significance of Christ as God and man

Throughout his theology Torrance emphasises the significance of Jesus Christ as God and man in one person. In everything he does, Jesus is the act of God and the act of man, the act of God as man in the one person of Christ. In him therefore and his atonement, the covenant with Israel (and in and through them with all peoples) comes to fruition in ultimate and final fulfilment, both from the side of God and of the people. In him God establishes himself as the God of his people, dwelling literally in their midst, taking them to himself by taking their sin on himself and atoning for it, while at the same time he acts from their side, in obedient amen to the covenant, in obedient acceptance of the judgement and discipline of the covenant and in obediently fulfilling the covenant in his own life and heart on behalf of the people. It is only through atonement that the fulfilment of the covenant and its universalisation can take place, for only through the ultimate judging

of sin and the putting of it away through the agony and passion of Jesus in his life and death, can the people and all peoples be cleansed of their sin and made the people of God.

The place of the sacraments in expressing better than words the meaning of atonement

For Torrance, the sacraments are given to us to express more fully than words ever can the mystery of the atonement and of our incorporation into Christ. In baptism, we are incorporated into Christ's baptism completed on the cross, baptised into his death and united with him in his resurrection. In holy communion, we are given the sacrament of his passion so that in its celebration we may show forth his death until he comes again and as we eat the bread and drink the cup have communion with him through his body and blood shed on the cross. As Torrance says, 'That is the meaning of the atonement which the sacrament expresses better than words.' The importance of the sacraments for the nourishment of faith and for the eschatological perspective embedded in them is seen in the number of times Torrance refers to them.

(b) The life of Christ a ransom, poured out on the cross for the redemption of the many

In giving his life as a ransom in redemption of the many, Jesus fulfils in himself the Old Testament concepts of redemption. Torrance examines the New Testament words for redemption, paying particular attention to which Hebrew words are translated by which Greek words in the Greek Old Testament and which therefore lie behind and inform their meaning in the New Testament. Behind redemption in the New Testament Torrance finds the threefold Hebrew root *padah*, *kipper* and *gaal*, three verbs each describing a different aspect of redemption but overlapping in meaning:

(i) *padah*, redeem, ransom, refers to a mighty act of God in deliverance of his people out of bondage and oppression into liberty, as in the redemption of Israel out of Egypt.

(ii) *kipper*, redeem, ransom, refers to God's covering of sin through the provision of an equivalent and is the word regularly used in the Old Testament for atoning for sin.

(iii) *gaal*, redeem, refers to redemption out of slavery or bankruptcy by someone with a kinship in blood or a sharing in common property. The noun *go'el* refers to the person of the redeemer, the 'kinsman-redeemer' as they are known in translation.

The distinction in meaning is not always maintained in the Old Testament and sometimes the words can be used more or less interchangeably, but together they help constitute the rich concept of redemption in the New Testament where all three are interwoven in the person and life of Jesus. Atonement and redemption in the New Testament is the mighty act of deliverance out of sin, guilt and the powers of evil into the liberty of the kingdom through the covering of sin in sacrifice by someone sharing kinship in flesh and blood with those redeemed. In Jesus it is God himself who redeems his people, not only as God but in virtue of his being *go'el*, their kinsman through incarnation.

(c) The priesthood of Jesus Christ and the letter to the Hebrews

In his chapter on the priesthood of Christ Torrance focuses on the letter to the Hebrews, pointing out the close parallels between the teaching of Hebrews and that of Paul on law and justification. Torrance's analysis of the nature of priesthood in the Old Testament and of Jesus' priesthood in the New is one of his most distinctive and important doctrines. There are at least four major points:

(i) all priesthood in the bible is from God, is his initiative and is by his appointment. Although the priest represents the people, the priest is appointed by God to represent them and not by the people themselves. The whole initiative and movement comes from God. There is no concept of man acting on God, let alone of man trying to appease God by sacrifice. It is God who forgives, who wills to forgive and who takes the initiative in forgiveness.

(ii) although again and again in the bible the priesthood forsake their true function, the priest is primarily to be thought of as mediator of the word of God, teacher of it and witness to it. The basic concept of priesthood is represented by Moses and Aaron together and in that sense may be said to be a double priesthood, with Moses as the 'logos' priest, or priest of the word, and Aaron as the liturgical priest, the one who witnesses to the word of God and acts only on its basis and in obedience to it. Moses' priesthood is primary: his function is to mediate the word of God to the people, he receives the word of God and takes it to the people. In obedience to it he ordains Aaron as the liturgical priest, to act in witness to the word and at God's appointment to act in liturgical witness to God's will to forgive through the provision of sacrifice. While the priest in the Old Testament is said to 'make atonement', that is by way of obedience to the provision of God for forgiveness within the covenant and is not to be thought of as an acting on God.

(iii) just as the high priest on the day of atonement represented all Israel, symbolised by his wearing the names of the 12 tribes on his shoulders and breastplate, so Christ in his life, death, and resurrection represents all humanity, the one for the many. Just as Christ assumed the human nature of all humanity in the incarnation, so in his death he died for all – ‘one died for all; therefore all have died’ (2 Cor 5.14). For Torrance, the range of representation is the same in the incarnation and the atonement - incarnation and atonement are integral to each other and whoever Christ represents in one he represents in both.

(iv) while Jesus’ priesthood begins on earth it becomes eternal in the resurrection. He is ‘the priest of the resurrection’ who by the power of his resurrection life ever lives to intercede for his people. The heavenly priesthood of Christ, much neglected in theology and the church in general, is one of the major emphases of Torrance. It is the continuing priesthood of Christ, his presentation before the Father in heaven of his once and for all self-offering on the cross, which is our only offering to God. We are accepted in his offering, in his prayer and his is the faith we present before the face of the Father as our own. Jesus is not only the God *whom* we worship and the mediator *through whom* we worship, but the one *with whom* we worship, who as man offers perfect faith and worship and who is ‘the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ and the leader of our worship.

(d) Atonement as justification, reconciliation and redemption in the teaching of Paul

In successive chapters Torrance looks at the Pauline concept of atonement as justification, as reconciliation and as redemption:

(i) in justification the emphasis is on righteousness in terms of the law and on freedom from the bondage of the law in the complete fulfilment of law and of judgement in the atoning death and resurrection of Christ.

(ii) in reconciliation the emphasis is on the personal element of restoration to fellowship and peace with God through the overcoming of the enmity and obstacle of sin in the wonderful exchange achieved by Christ for us in his humanity.

(iii) in redemption the emphasis is on the mighty act of redemption in Christ, completed in the pouring out of the Spirit and reaching out to the final redemption of the body and of the whole universe in the new creation.

Although Torrance's three chapters deal with different aspects of atonement in Paul, they overlap and share common themes in different ways. The following points are central to Torrance's understanding of Paul and fundamental to his own theology.

(i) Justification, reconciliation and redemption are complete in the person and work of Christ

Throughout his theology, Torrance emphasises that the person and work of Jesus Christ cannot be separated. Salvation is in him, inside his person which cannot be separated from his work. The work of salvation is the act of his person, the decisive act of God in history accomplishing our justification, reconciliation and redemption in his person. This means that justification, for example, or reconciliation, cannot be thought of simply as a work accomplished by Christ, as something which he did to fulfil the law. It is a work, but it is a work which is essentially the work of his person, which is inseparable from his person and is to be found only within his person, in the inseparable unity of his person and work.

(ii) Justification, reconciliation and redemption are the act of God and man in Christ

Again throughout his theology, Torrance emphasises that in Jesus Christ we have the act of God and of man, of God as man in his one person. Justification, reconciliation and redemption therefore must be thought of not simply as the act of God for our salvation, but also as the real act of man, of God as man for us. The importance of this for Torrance's theology and for understanding it cannot be overstated. Justification is not simply the act of God judging sin, atoning for it himself and declaring us righteous in his beloved Son, it is man saying amen to the righteous judgement of God and at the same time fulfilling all righteousness in his own perfect life and humanity. Reconciliation is thus not simply God reconciling the world to himself in Christ, but reconciliation worked out, achieved and realised by Christ as man within his own person, in his own mind, life, heart and soul. Redemption is the mighty act of God in which mankind is liberated from bondage and decay into the new creation through the resurrection of the man Jesus Christ from the dead in the fullness of physical existence.

(iii) Justification, reconciliation and redemption can only take place through the complete assertion of the truth of God and the complete fulfilment of the law

Torrance stresses that atonement can only take place through the complete assertion of the truth and righteousness of God against sin and evil. Justification of the ungodly therefore does not mean that there

is any lessening of judgement or overlooking of sin but the contrary. There can only be forgiveness through the naming of sin as sin and its designation as untruth by the truth of God. Any mitigation of judgement would mean that God had not really opposed sin and that sin had not been confronted to the full and dealt with. The very Godness of God, the steadfast love, truth and rightness of God, means his direct opposition to the lie of sin and if God did not judge sin to the full he would 'unGod himself' as Torrance puts it.

The mystery and miracle of atonement in Christ is that there is at once total and utter opposition to sin and at the same time its complete forgiveness, at once the maintenance of the righteousness of God and the justification of the ungodly, without any bypassing or belittling of judgement but the opposite. Forgiveness takes place only in and through total judgement, the judgement of the holy love of God. For Torrance, it is because forgiveness does not take place apart from judgement but only through it, that we know it is real and total. It is because the voice of forgiveness and of judgement are the same, because it is the same voice which judges us which also forgives us, that is what tells us and that is why we know we are really and truly forgiven. On the cross, the voice of judgement and forgiveness are the same voice, the voice of total judgement and the voice of total forgiveness. In the passion of Christ on the cross it is one and the same voice, and one identical with the voice of the Father.

(iv) Justification, reconciliation and redemption are the liberation of humanity from the abstract legal and ethical order into direct personal relation with God

One of the most interesting and significant elements of Torrance's theology is his understanding of the nature of sin, law and the moral order. In its very nature sin is not only rebellion but deception. As alienation from life in God and the truth of God, human sin is a fall into corruption, chaos and decay where man can no longer know or perceive the truth of God as he is. In that situation God gives humanity the law to order human life and restrain chaos from overwhelming it and in order to reveal something of his holy will for them. The law is holy and given by God and yet in the nature of the case it is abstract and can only reinforce the distance between man and God. It is only given in the situation where humanity no longer knows God, where there is a gap between the 'is' and the 'ought', between what people are and what they ought to be. In that situation where human beings are *not* what they ought to be, law can only reinforce the fact that they are not what they should

be. No amount of trying to keep the law can bridge the essential gap between the 'is' and the 'ought' and can result only in external conformity to the law, for the human heart and mind remains unchanged in alienation from God in its very roots.

In fact as Paul saw, even though it is holy and given by God the law becomes 'the strength of sin'. It is used by the powers of evil not only to accuse the sinner but as an abstract shield for the sinner to hide behind from the presence of God, yielding only an outward conformity to the law and enabling the sinner to claim a self-righteousness while withholding from God the obedience of the heart. In Jesus Christ, as Torrance sees clearly, God steps out from behind the law and meets us personally and face to face in him. Justification is 'under the law' but 'apart from law' in the language of Paul. While given by God, the whole legal and moral order is only of interim validity, for in justification and reconciliation it is fulfilled but at the same time transcended in direct and personal relations between God and the human person.

(v) Atonement as justification, reconciliation and redemption is completed and actualised in the church through the sending of the Spirit

For Torrance, the sending of the Spirit is the completion of the atonement, for with the coming of the Spirit the atonement is actualised in the disciples. Through the Spirit the atonement which is already complete in the person of Christ is actualised in the church as through union with him it begins to partake of everything that he is for them. The justification, reconciliation and redemption which was worked out in the person of Jesus and finalised for us in his risen humanity now begins to be worked out in us through our incorporation into him.

(vi) Justification, reconciliation and redemption which are essentially corporate in Christ reach out to the whole of creation in a cosmic peace

For Torrance the far reaching effects of atonement in Christ reach out in two ways. They reach backwards through the undoing of sin and guilt to re-establish contact with creation, making the past to serve the purpose of redemption, and they reach forward through the Spirit to the unveiling of the full reality of Christ and the establishment of a vast cosmic peace. Redemption in Christ, which is essentially corporate in him involving solidarity with the whole body of humanity for which he died, means reconciliation with the very fabric of the universe and a reconciliation which must reach out through the gospel to the whole of creation and the ends of the universe.

2 The resurrection and ascension of Jesus and his sending of the Spirit

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead and his ascension into heaven are two of the mighty events of his life and an integral part of his whole salvation. His resurrection and ascension mean the justification and forgiveness of humanity and the lifting up of man into participation in the life and love of the holy Trinity.

(a) The resurrection of Jesus Christ

(i) The resurrection is the mighty act of God in the person of Christ defeating death

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not simply the raising of someone from the dead but the mighty act of God in his person undoing death itself in a new creation. In his risen humanity, Jesus is 'the firstborn from the dead' and the 'first fruits' of the new creation. In his incarnation Jesus became a human being of flesh and blood. In his resurrection he rises in the same body, but one which is no longer subject to the disintegrating processes of death and which has been transformed into 'glorious body', freed from corruption and decay. That is an almighty creative act, comparable in significance to creation itself, and one in which the whole of creation will follow and for which it is waiting and groaning in expectation and hope.

(ii) The resurrection is the fulfilment of the incarnation and atonement

The resurrection of Jesus in the body shows that when God became man in him that was not a temporary episode, merely for the time he lived on earth. It also shows that Jesus had realised in the body, in the actual physical and space-time existence of human life, the salvation he had come to accomplish for humanity. The resurrection demonstrates that the hypostatic union of true God and true man in the person of Christ had held firm through death and hell until it had been fulfilled and established as a permanent reality in the new creation. The resurrection thus demonstrates the fulfilment and permanence of the incarnation.

There is an inseparable relation here between the resurrection, atonement and the incarnation. Just as the incarnation is fulfilled in the atonement, so the atonement is realised in the resurrection. Just as the hypostatic union of God and man in the incarnation is worked out in the life of Jesus and fulfilled in his person in his reconciliation of God and man in atonement, so the resurrection is the fulfilment of

justification and the actualisation of the forgiveness of the atonement. The undoing of sin in atonement means the undoing of death which is its natural consequence and therefore forgiveness in the bible means the overcoming of death. If death is not actually overcome then the act of forgiveness has not ultimately touched sin at its very root and undone it. Thus as Paul saw, the bodily resurrection of Jesus is critical to the gospel, 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.'

The resurrection is the fulfilment of justification and without it justification is empty

Similarly, the resurrection is the fulfilment of justification. The resurrection of Jesus in his human nature means that in his person there has been established a positive human righteousness. His risen humanity is our risen life and our risen and permanent righteousness. In his life on earth, in his growth in wisdom and stature and favour with God and man, in his life of service, love, prayer, faith and obedience to the Father, Jesus is our human righteousness. When therefore he rises from the dead, having made atonement for us, having in the midst of bearing the judgement of God fulfilled all human righteousness in obedient amen to it and continued faith and trust in God right down into death, then in his resurrection his righteousness is established as our righteousness. The risen righteousness of Christ is the positive content of our justification.

For Torrance, if we have no doctrine of the risen righteousness of Christ and of our union with him through the Spirit then we have mutilated and gravely emptied the doctrine of justification of much of its content. For him therefore a 'purely legal' or a 'purely forensic' understanding of justification (that our status as sinners is purely one of having righteousness 'reckoned' to us, i.e. that through Christ we are treated as righteous in terms of the law while still sinners in ourselves) overlooks the positive righteousness of the risen Jesus and the fact that we are brought into real union with him through the Spirit. We are still sinners and have no righteousness of our own, but through real union with Christ and his righteousness we do have a real righteousness in him and are made righteous in him, not simply declared to be righteous.

(iii) The resurrection is the beginning of the new creation headed by Jesus

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is literally the beginning of a new creation headed by Jesus. He is the new man, the head of the new race, the firstborn of the dead, the firstfruits of the new creation, the new Adam who breathes life into others and who as such is said to be 'a

life-giving spirit'. As Torrance points out in this connection, being a 'spiritual body' as Jesus was after his resurrection does not mean that he is less body but more body. His body is now new and 'glorious body', so alive and full of life that he makes others alive and is said to be 'a life-giving spirit' (Phil 3.21; 1 Cor 15.45). What has happened to Jesus will happen to the whole human race and indeed to the whole of creation. He is the pioneer, the one who is in his person the secret and life-giving renewal of the whole universe. That as Torrance emphasises is the cosmic significance for the New Testament of the incarnation, atonement and resurrection of the Son of God in our humanity.

(iv) A real resurrection is fundamental to the Christian faith

For Torrance, just as for Karl Barth in the modern era and classical theology in general, the real resurrection of Jesus is critical and fundamental to the Christian faith. As Torrance says, a resurrection that is not bodily is not resurrection and if Jesus' death was a real bodily event then so also was his resurrection. A bodily resurrection, like the incarnation, is the ultimate affirmation of the reality of creation and of creaturely being. Everything for the Christian faith depends on the fact that God actually became incarnate in Jesus, that 'in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' to quote Paul, that in our flesh and blood existence in space and time we have nothing less than God himself meeting us face to face in Jesus Christ. For Torrance, if Jesus is not risen in the body then ultimately the gospel has nothing to say to men and women of flesh and blood and does not actually reach them in their physical existence. The gospel has lost its kernel and nerve centre and been emasculated of its motive power.

(v) The nature of the resurrection event

Torrance devotes a full chapter to the nature of the resurrection and here his theology and his interest in science overlap in his ground breaking discussion of the nature of the incarnation and of the resurrection in relation to space and time. While the resurrection of Jesus is an event which takes place within creation, it is not an event on the same level as other events and is not to be thought of as an interruption of the natural order. It is an almighty creative event. While it is a real event in space and time it is an event of an entirely different order. Just as the creation can be observed once it has come into being but the process of creation out of nothing cannot itself be observed, so the manner of the resurrection event cannot be traced or observed but once Jesus has risen and appears to us in space and time, then he can be seen and touched but not completely apprehended within the old framework or held down within it.

The resurrection is an event in history but one going beyond it into a new creation

For Torrance, the resurrection is an event in history but one going beyond it into a new creation. It means the undoing and redemption of the past into a new order of being, the death of the old creation and its resurrection into new space and time. In his resurrection Jesus is the beginning of a new reality and of new space and time. More real and more bodily than the old creation subject to death and decay, the resurrection reality of Jesus is a creative act of God which until his return can be known only through word and Spirit by faith and cannot be apprehended (or if at all only dimly) within the framework of space and time as we know it at present.

The openness and non-prescriptiveness of the modern concept of scientific law

With his understanding of science Torrance was aware of the way in which the modern concept of scientific law had moved away from the old prescriptive model to a much more open and flexible one. For him many theologians and ministers still operate with a concept of scientific law as rigid prescriptive laws which cannot be broken. When so understood, such a view rules out all possibility of miracle or of real divine intervention in history as an interference in natural processes and a breaking of the laws of nature. In fact, for Torrance, modern science particularly after Einstein is not inherently hostile to the concept of God or divine intervention in the way it is still thought to be especially by non-scientists. Torrance quotes the celebrated American physicist and expert on scientific law Richard Feynman. Not a believer himself, but in order to illustrate his point when lecturing at Princeton on the difference between the modern concept and the Newtonian concept of law which excluded miracles, Feynman said, 'You know, this would not be hostile even to Christian views of incarnation and resurrection.'¹

(b) The ascension of Jesus Christ

Often sadly neglected and bypassed the ascension is for Torrance one of the most important of all theological doctrines. The interconnectedness of all Christian doctrine in the one person of Christ from his incarnation to his final coming again means that if any one doctrine is neglected or not given its proper place then every other doctrine is weakened and impoverished. So it is with the doctrine of the ascension. It is a vital part of Christian faith and an essential link in

¹ 'Interview with Professor Thomas F. Torrance', in *Different Gospels*, ed. by Dr Andrew Walker, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1988, p. 44.

the chain of doctrine. Take it out of the picture and other doctrines suffer a loss of significance and coherence and can find themselves hanging in the air and similarly downplayed.

(i) The ascension creates a pause in the parousia, creating time for the gospel before the final coming of Jesus

For Torrance there is strictly only one *parousia* or coming-and-presence of Christ in the New Testament but the effect of the ascension is to create a pause in it and to delay or hold back the final coming of Jesus in order to give time for the preaching of the gospel and repentance. If Jesus had not ascended, says Torrance, then the last judgement would have been upon us with no time for the preaching of the gospel or for repentance. By withdrawing his physical presence Jesus has created time for the gospel without lessening its eschatological urgency and the need stated in his parables to be ready at all times for his coming. Torrance also points out how Jesus' parables of the nobleman going into the far country show that he envisaged a considerable gap between his physical leaving of the disciples and his return. It is the ascension which creates the pause between his 'first coming' and his 'second coming' as they came to be known.

(ii) The ascension is the obverse of the incarnation and marks its fulfilment

The incarnation is the coming of God 'down' to humanity, to assume human flesh and to be one with man in the person of Christ. The ascension is Jesus' taking of our humanity in his person into the presence of God into the union and communion of the love of the Trinity. From the very beginning the goal and purpose of the incarnation was the reconciliation of humanity to God through the atoning union of God and man in Christ. Beginning on earth, the whole movement of the reconciling union of man to God in Christ was completed in heaven, in Christ's taking our humanity into the eternal fellowship of love in the Trinity. If the incarnation, says Torrance, was the meeting of God and man on earth in man's place, then the ascension is the meeting of man and God in heaven in God's place. The ascension can thus be seen to be the obverse of the incarnation and its fulfilment.

(iii) The ascension and the sending of the Spirit are the completion of the atonement

The ascension of Jesus and his sending of the Spirit to realise in the minds and hearts of the disciples the atonement he had won for them marks the completion of the atonement. Through the coming of the Spirit the work of atonement already realised in the person of Christ

was realised in the church. The work of the Spirit is to so unite the church to Christ in heaven that all the treasures of salvation in Christ begin to be realised in the church. They are not realised in the church as a possession which it has for itself but only as the church lives in union with Christ. Then through the Spirit the church is given to live by the faith of Christ so that his faith becomes its faith and the prayer of Christ himself on earth, '*Abba, Father*' is put into the lips of the church and it is given to pray '*Abba, Father*'.

(iv) A proper doctrine of the ascension is fundamental to the Christian faith

A proper understanding of the ascension is vital to the church's grasp not only of the risen reality and continuing ministry of Jesus Christ but of the certainty of his return and the unveiling of the new creation. Without the ascension, the church's focus shifts inevitably away from the risen Christ, simply to his ministry on earth and he becomes a spiritualised Jesus, lacking the reality of his continuing humanity. There is a loss of the threefold office of Christ as king, priest and prophet.

(1) The ascension and the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ as king, priest and prophet

The ascension of Christ the king

It is in the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father that he is 'made both Lord and Christ' as Peter saw in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. In his ascension Jesus is enthroned to rule over heaven and earth, for as Paul saw also 'he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet'. The ascension is the inauguration of the kingdom of Christ and of his heavenly rule over all the powers in the universe. Without it the church lacks the triumphant New Testament certainty of Jesus' victory over all the powers of death and guilt in his death and resurrection. The reign of Christ however is not one in which he rules by power and earthly might but by the power of the gospel, the power of his word and Spirit.

The ascension of Christ the priest

The ascension is the beginning of the heavenly or continuing priesthood of Christ, a major theme of the letter to the Hebrews. The ministry of Christ, begun on earth as prophet, priest and king is continued in heaven as king, priest and prophet. As high priest, Jesus Christ presents before the Father his once and for all offering of himself on our behalf and 'ever lives to make intercession' for his people. As the eternal leader of our intercession and himself our one true prayer, Jesus is the leader and mediator of the church's worship and prayer, a point central to Torrance's understanding of Christian liturgy and worship.

The ascension of Christ the prophet

As king and priest, Christ reigns through his word, through the power of the word and truth of God, the power of the gospel of his redeeming love and the power of his heavenly intercession. Through the Spirit, he himself is present in the church, continuing his own prophetic ministry in its ministry. In the church's ministry of word and sacrament, it is Christ himself who speaks to people through its word, who incorporates them into his baptism and feeds them with himself the Word of God incarnate in our humanity, the bread of his living word and risen life.

(2) The ascension and the final coming of Jesus

By withdrawing himself from physical and visible presence to us, Jesus creates for Torrance a threefold relation to himself in his ascension. The fact that Jesus is not tangibly present to us focuses attention on his reality in heaven, where he is known to us on earth through his presence in his word and Spirit. At the same time, since the only knowledge we can have of him is through the witness of the apostles in the New Testament, Jesus sends us back to them, to his historical life on earth for knowledge of him in heaven. Together, those two elements, the heavenly reality of Christ known immediately through the Spirit but mediately and historically through the gospel, point inevitably forward to the day when Jesus will come again and no longer be physically absent, but present and we will know him face to face without the need for word and sacrament.

As Torrance puts it, the ascension creates a threefold relation to Christ:

- (i) historical relation to the historical Jesus Christ,
- (ii) sacramental relation to the crucified and risen Jesus Christ,
- (iii) eschatological relation to the ascended and advent Christ.

At its heart, the ascension creates an intense tension between the reality of the new creation in Christ and the old creation of death and decay, an intense awareness of the fact that the new world is already real in Christ and yet absent from us in its full manifestation, a longing for the day when the reality we already know and taste through word and sacrament will be unveiled and fully and visibly present. For Torrance a proper understanding of the ascension is at the heart of understanding the triumphant New Testament sense of the risen reality of Jesus Christ and its certain hope of his final unveiling in the new creation.

(v) The nature of the ascension event

For Torrance, the nature of the ascension event is closely related to the nature of the resurrection event and follows on from it. The death of Jesus was his death as part of our old space-time creation as we know it. His resurrection on the other side of death and beyond old space-time was his resurrection in new space-time, a space-time which he himself had created by his resurrection, by his putting the old space-time to death in his death and raising himself in his new body to create new space-time. (Torrance has here in his chapter on the ascension a helpful if brief discussion, complementing that in *Incarnation*, on the modern scientific and dynamic view of space-time where if we can so summarise it, it is bodies-in-motion that create space-time rather than space and time being separate, prior, static containers into which bodies are placed.)

An event in space and time but going beyond them

The forty days of Jesus' life on earth after the resurrection was a time when Jesus already himself in new space and time through his resurrection was able to appear to the disciples within old space and time – hence the rather baffling nature of his appearances. The ascension was the event in which already himself in new space and time but with one foot as it were (if we can put it like that) in old space and time for the disciples' sake, Jesus departed from old space and time into the presence of God as symbolised by the cloud. The ascension was the withdrawal and separation from our senses of Jesus in new space-time, marking the end of his continuing but intermittent presence in old space-time after his resurrection. For Torrance, the ascension is an event in space-time but going beyond it and which therefore needs to be thought out both in relation to space and time and yet as going beyond them into God.

(c) The coming of the Holy Spirit and the creation of the apostles and apostolic tradition

The ascension of Jesus leads directly to his sending of the Holy Spirit, 'for if I do not go away', said Jesus, 'the Counsellor [Advocate-Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.' The sending of the Spirit is one of Jesus' mighty acts of salvation, for in it he completed the atonement in the minds and hearts of his disciples and the church. In the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus himself returned to be present in the church and through the Spirit to create the apostolate and found the church as his body on the basis of their witness.

(i) The role of the Spirit is to witness to Christ and open the human mind and heart to his truth

The role of the Spirit is to witness to Christ, to remind the disciples and through them the church of all that Jesus had told them, to declare him to them and to guide them into all his truth. The Spirit does not speak of himself but of Christ and opens the minds and hearts of humanity to receive him. The Spirit of God is God in his ability to be present to the creature and to open up the creaturely mind and heart to know God himself in his revelation in Christ. The Spirit reveals Christ and opens up the creature to know and receive him.

This does not mean however that Christ is not equally present in all that the Spirit does. Just as 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' so Jesus Christ is himself present in the work of the Spirit. In revelation, as in creation, atonement and redemption, Father, Son and Spirit are all inseparably involved.

The Spirit is the 'shaliach' in whom Christ himself is present and active

In order to explain the relation of the Spirit to Christ here Torrance uses the Hebrew concept of 'shaliach' which lies behind the New Testament concept of the apostles as the special representatives of Christ. A 'shaliach' is so authorised to represent someone that in their word and act the person they represent is regarded as personally present. Just as Jesus was the unique 'shaliach' of the Father in word and deed, so the Spirit is the unique 'shaliach' of Christ and so in turn through the work of the Spirit are the apostles.

(ii) The creation of the apostolate as the definitive and authorised witness to Jesus Christ

Through his sending of the Spirit to complete his revelation of himself to the disciples, to bring them to full understanding of everything they could not understand before the completion of atonement and reconciliation, Jesus made the disciples his apostles, his 'sheluchim', his specially chosen and commissioned envoys, authorised to represent him in word and deed. The disciples had already been selected and specially trained during the life of Jesus on earth, but now with their minds opened to full comprehension they were made apostles, his definitive and specially inspired witnesses. It is their apostolic testimony and witness which is the foundation of the church and their understanding is the one which Jesus means his church to have of him. The mind of Jesus himself is uniquely enshrined in the apostolic mind and the apostolic gospel is his full and final revelation of himself.

(iii) The creation of apostolic tradition and the New Testament

As the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit translated Jesus' self-witness into human testimony to him, the tradition they had been given by Jesus became apostolic tradition and was given permanent form in the New Testament. Through the Spirit and through the presence of Christ himself in their word, the tradition of the apostles encapsulated in the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament became apostolic scripture, so joined to the divine Word as to be the written word of God to man. The New Testament became acknowledged as the authentic apostolic tradition and as the only foundation of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

(iv) The question of the relation between the Word made flesh and the written word

The creation through the Spirit of apostolic word and apostolic scriptures to become the written word of the New Testament through which Christ himself speaks, raises the question of the relation between the Word made flesh and the written word, the relation between the living Word of God who is Christ himself and the written word of God in the Old and New Testaments. Torrance has several guiding principles to outline here, all fundamental to his theology.

(d) The doctrine of scripture: the apostolic (and prophetic) basis of the church*(i) The basic text of the New Testament is the obedient humanity of Jesus Christ*

The basic text of the apostles and of the New Testament is Jesus Christ himself. The text they 'read', interpreted and preached was a living text, Jesus Christ in his obedient humanity, in the unity of his word, deeds and life, inseparable in his person. That is the one and only basic text of the apostles, the living, obedient humanity of Jesus Christ.

(ii) The New Testament is the inspired secondary text

The New Testament is the inspired witness through which we read and know the basic text. It is Christ's own creation through the Spirit so that in the apostolic gospel of its pages he may still confront people with the basic text of revelation in his own humanity. The secondary text is also revelation, for it is the inspired text through which the basic text is given objectively to us to be received subjectively through the Spirit. The New Testament is the inspired and indispensable window for knowledge of Jesus Christ.