

# Thomas Torrance: Participation, imitation and agency in the Christian life

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ad loc.	<i>ad locum</i> , at the place discussed
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
ESV	English Standard Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NPNF	Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers
PG	“Patrologiae Graece” (the Greek Fathers)
q.v.	<i>quod vide</i> , which see; go to see
s.v.	<i>sub voce</i> , under the word or heading
TIS	Theological Interpretation of Scripture

## GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS<sup>1</sup>

Contingency – “A characteristic of finite things that exist but do not exist necessarily” (*Pocket dictionary of apologetics and philosophy of religion*, 2002:28).

Deification (Theosis) – The Christian life as a restoration of the likeness of God through a work of the Holy Spirit communicating the energies of God so that we increasingly become partakers of the divine nature (Bray, 2000:189). Torrance does not follow the Eastern Orthodox teaching on the division between the essence and energies of God. He does affirm the heart of the doctrine of theosis, namely, Christian partaking or participation in the divine life and the divine nature (Westepal, 2018:2).

Grace – “Grace is to be understood as the impartation not just of something from God but of God himself. In Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit God freely gives himself to us in such a way that the Gift and the Giver are one and the same in the wholeness and indivisibility of His grace...” (Torrance, 2003:14–15).

Imitation [of Christ] – “Following the example or copying the actions of another person. Christians are called upon to become Christlike” (*Dictionary of Biblical themes Scripture index*, 2009a).

Latin heresy – A term used by Torrance to describe a dualistic or partitive habit of thought that he argues originated and continues to be prevalent in Western philosophical and theological traditions.

Participation in Christ – “The joining of believers to Jesus Christ, through faith, whereby they are freed from participation in Adam by sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection, his nature, sufferings and glory and whereby, too, they become part of his body” (*Dictionary of Biblical themes Scripture index*, 2009b). Torrance adds a particular stress on participation in Christ’s active obedience and the goal of theosis (see definition of deification above).

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<sup>1</sup> The definitions offered are generic. In some cases I have given a brief indication of how Torrance develops the underlying concept, but fuller accounts are presented in this study. Where there is no reference, I am responsible for the preliminary gloss.

## **ABSTRACT**

Every Christian and every Christian community must have an answer to the question “How then shall we live?” Influential Scottish theologian T.F. Torrance has proposed an answer in terms of participation in Christ. Believers are transformed into the likeness of Christ as they increasingly share in his life of perfect faith and obedience to the Father by the Spirit. Theologians like John Webster have criticised Torrance’s model for eliminating any kind of role, agency or responsibility for the human subject. Webster proposes that participation must be supplemented by imitation, which gives content and shape to our union with Christ and to the Christian life. A study of Scripture and Torrance’s relevant sources reveals that an integrated model which holds participation and imitation in close relation is preferable to a position which stresses participation over imitation, or vice versa.

Key terms: agency, participation, union with Christ, theosis, imitation, ethical example, theology, ethics, the Christian life, Torrance, Webster.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Preliminary literature review

### 1.1.1 Introduction

Brock (2012:274–277) describes how, up until the modern period, ethics was considered an entailment of theology. In effect, ethics as a separate discipline did not exist before modernity. The Christian life flowed from doctrinal commitments, and the two were not obviously distinguishable. The Enlightenment catalysed a shift to secular reason and morality. Natural reason became the locus of moral thought, and the setting for moral thought moved to the secular university. It was only in this modern context that Christian ethics could emerge as a distinct discipline. Kant had opened the divide between theory and practice, and Christian ethics, in its uniquely modern guise, mirrored that divide. Whereas ethics had always been the entailment of theological conviction, now it could be considered as something separate, albeit derivatively so.

In Brock's (2012:277) own words:

From a theological perspective, then, “modernity” names that time in which Christians face the problem of finding an appropriate response to secular morality, as well as the temptation to claim they have a “morality” separable from their doctrinal affirmations about the reality of the work of Jesus Christ. The story of Christian ethics in the last 150–200 years is lamentable in being largely a story of succumbing to this temptation.

Christian ethics as a modern discipline emerged in the intellectual context of German liberal Protestantism, where the fundamental premise was that the Christian must be liberated from antiquated and historically located thought patterns into the freedom of autonomous reason. For an ethic to be valid, it must transcend space and time. Thus modern ethics was estranged from its historical doctrinal roots. In fact, it often assumed a critical attitude over against those roots (Brock, 2012:277–281). Theology and ethics had come adrift.

It was in this late modern climate that Thomas Torrance forged his theology of *participatio*. Before we explore his theology, a few preliminary biographical remarks are in order.

### 1.1.2 The biography and influence of T.F. Torrance

Thomas Forsyth Torrance has been variously described as “the greatest Reformed theologian since Karl Barth” (Hunsinger, 2009:11) and “the most outstanding Reformed theologian in the English-speaking world during the twentieth century” (Coyler, 2008). He was professor of

Christian dogmatics at the University of Edinburgh for twenty-seven years and served as moderator for the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1976–1977 (Heron, 2009:6).

Born to missionary parents (1913), Torrance grew up in China. He returned to Scotland and studied in Edinburgh before undertaking his doctorate in Basle under the supervision of Karl Barth. Torrance followed Barth in the style of constructive systematic theology that the Swiss-German had pioneered (Heron, 2009:7). Torrance was an eminent ecumenist and had a deep interest in the interface between science and theology, an avenue of enquiry that won him the Templeton Prize in 1978 (Coyler, 2008). He was also an accomplished translator, and produced English translations of Calvin's New Testament commentaries and Barth's *Church Dogmatics* (Bromiley, 2009:13; Hunsinger, 2009:11).

As to his basic theological commitments, Torrance's chief concern was to develop a truly biblical theology centred on the person and work of Christ (Torrance, 2009:27). In that endeavour, Torrance would place himself somewhere between Calvin and Barth on the theological spectrum. Both Calvin and Barth were profoundly influential on him. He was also influenced by Athanasius, whom he considered his favourite theologian, and the Nicene fathers. Indeed, his profound understanding of Greek Patristics allowed him to actively pursue at large the Eastern Orthodox–Reformed theological dialogue so evident in his own writings (Hunsinger, 2009:11). In epistemology, Michael Polanyi had the greatest influence on Torrance (Heron, 2009:7). These were his primary influences.

Gerald Bray (quoted in Habets, 2009:197) captures something of Torrance's own ongoing influence on contemporary theology:

It can hardly be an accident that Reformed theologians of the stature of Thomas Torrance... have shown themselves so open to receiving the insights of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, while at the same time remaining firmly anchored in the Augustinian West and fully appreciative of Karl Barth's contribution to its continuing theological vigour. Serious engagement with the East may be a recent development, but there are indications even in the theology of John Calvin that point towards an openness in that direction, and it may well be that there is something inherent in the Reformed tradition since the sixteenth century that makes it peculiarly able to reach out to the East in ways that might be able to bridge the gap between what appear to be two irreconcilable theological positions.

### **1.1.3 The contours of Torrance's theology**

In reaction to a modern theology coloured by German idealism and beset with dualism, Torrance subscribes to a theological brand of critical realism (Baker, 2010:5–43). He does so under the influence of Anselm, Philoponos, Einstein, Polanyi, Barth, Clerk, MacMurray and, it seems

reasonable to assume, Irenaeus of Lyons (Baker, 2010:6, 38; Fergusson, 2010:85; Habets, 2009:4). Torrance (quoted in Baker, 2010:6) defines critical realism as:

... an epistemic orientation of the two-way relation between the subject and object poles of thought and speech, in which ontological primacy and control are naturally accorded to reality over all our conceiving and speaking of it.

Thus the subject is active in the knowledge process, but objective knowledge, or true knowledge of the object, is possible, contra Kant (Baker, 2010:6).

Torrance's method is not limited to epistemology and is a dominant force in his theology *in toto* (Baker, 2010:10). Indeed, much of his theological project is devoted to exposing and denouncing the dualisms introduced by early Western theology, which Torrance labels the "Latin heresy". Torrance (quoted in Baker, 2010:13) describes the Latin heresy as "a habit of thinking in terms of external, symbolical or merely moral relations, which resulted in a serious loss of direct contact with reality." We see the correction (or over-correction) of this "heresy" throughout Torrance's theology, and it is especially prominent in his Christology, his soteriology and, arguably, his ethics. Positively stated, the theology of Thomas Torrance is largely an appeal for unity. In divine-human relations Torrance argues for a differentiated asymmetric unity with a stress on divine agency (Baker, 2010:41).

Walker's (2012:22) summary of Torrance's mature theology, paraphrased below, attests to the pervasive theme of differentiated unity (emphasis mine):

1. Complete *equality* of deity and *oneness of unity* in the *communion* of the Trinity.
2. *Homoousion* between the Father and the Son as a guarantee of the divine origin of salvation.
3. The hypostatic *union* as eternal bond between God and man in the person of Christ as the centre of salvation, revelation and reconciliation.
4. The *homoousion* of the Son with human being, as the guarantee that God reaches us in our humanity and saves us as a man.
5. The Son's assumption and sanctification of sinful human flesh, in *total oneness* with sinners, as the guarantee of redemption.
6. The incarnational *union* as the beginning of atonement, which climaxes on the cross through judgement, death, resurrection and ascension.

7. The Son's sending of the Spirit as the completion of *atonement* and the extension of his vicarious salvation as a human to humanity.
8. The Son's ongoing ministry of *uniting* humanity to himself in *communion* through Spirit and word.

Habets (2009) proposes *theosis* as the integrating theme of Torrance's theology. Theosis is certainly important to understanding Torrance, and also material to the question at hand. Theosis refers to human participation in the divine life and human transformation into divine likeness through the saving work of the Trinity (Habets, 2009:1–2; Saarinen, 2011:415). It is a contested theme of extreme unity, and whether we allow for the primacy of theosis in Torrance or not, it has a material bearing on our understanding of the Christian life (Keating, 2011:450–452).

#### **1.1.4 Torrance's Christology**

Torrance is primarily concerned with Christology and soteriology (Habets, 2009:49). His bent towards unity and the impulses of his method are keenly felt in those areas, with outworking in the rest of his theology.

Following Irenaeus and his theory of recapitulation, Torrance centres his anthropology on the humanity of Christ. The humanity of Christ is the locus of the *imago Dei*, such that the incarnation proleptically conditions all of creation (Habets, 2009:22, 28–29). Christ's humanity, rather than that of the pre-lapsarian Adam, is normative for Torrance. Therefore, theosis involves the end goal of humanising rather than divinising the believer (Habets, 2009:24). Man is truly man by union with Christ, "who alone is *the* Image of God" (Habets, 2009:33; emphasis original).

In his Christology, Torrance labours to overcome a dualism between the person and work of Christ that was, to his mind, a product of the Latin heresy. This dualism, according to Torrance, resulted in an understanding of redemption as an *external* moral and/or forensic relation between Christ and his people. He attempted to overcome the Christological dualism and its results in three steps: the double *homoousion*, the hypostatic union and the vicarious humanity of Christ (Habets, 2009:49–50).

The double *homoousion* expresses Jesus' oneness of divine being (and act) with the Father, and his oneness of human being (and act) with mankind (Habets, 2009:60). From the double *homoousion* follows the hypostatic union of the two natures in the one person of Christ (Habets, 2009:62). Torrance understands this hypostatic union to be the standard and measure of all personal relations. It is Jesus' human communion with the divine that opens up the same possibility for all humanity. Thus the hypostatic union has important implications for all human–

divine relations. Firstly, relating to the Son is commensurate with relating to the Father. Secondly, the hypostatic union is analogous to the Christian's union with Christ. "The former is by nature and substantial; the latter is by grace and relational" (Habets, 2009:62). Just as the hypostatic union followed from the double *homoousion*, so the vicarious humanity of Christ follows from both. Christ's ontological relation with humanity allows him to stand as its federal head, and implies that he, in his person, is the ground and the only means of communion with God (Habets, 2009:72).

It is in his understanding of the person of Christ that Torrance overcomes the dualisms he associates with the Latin heresy. For Torrance, the person and work of Christ are inseparable. The incarnation and the atonement are inseparable. The active and passive obedience of Christ are inseparable. Christology and soteriology are inseparable. In each case, Torrance places the accent on the former. Union in the person of Christ drives the impetus towards unity throughout Torrance's theology and, perhaps, into his ethics.

A summary of Torrance's Christology would be incomplete without reference to Christ's assumption of a fallen human nature. This is a "central axiom" for the Scottish theologian (Habets, 2015:18). He follows Gregory Nazianzen in asserting, "that which has not been assumed has not been healed" (Habets, 2009:59, 72) and extrapolates to the necessity of Christ assuming a fallen human nature. Torrance argues that Christ's human nature was *anhypostatic* and *enhyposstatic*, which enables him to maintain the sinlessness of Christ's person in spite of the assumption of a fallen human nature (Habets, 2009:69). The assumption of a fallen nature is in line with Torrance's methodological commitments to avoid the Latin "habit of thinking", and to cast his soteriology in terms of real ontological change. At this point it appears that his methodology and his soteriology inform his Christology.

### **1.1.5 Torrance's soteriology**

This brings us to Torrance's soteriology. Torrance understands soteriology in terms of reconciliation, and reconciliation in terms of man's union with Christ. He follows Mackintosh in making union central to soteriology and argues that Calvin does the same (Habets, 2009:98–103). Torrance uses three words to articulate the Trinitarian nature of union in Christ (Habets, 2009:105). In *prothesis*, the Father purposes the union of God and man in Christ. *Mysterion* describes the mystery of said union. It is a mystery upheld by the double *homoousion* and realised in the hypostatic union, in which human and divine natures combine in perfect unity. In *koinonia* this objective union in Christ is made subjective to the believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Salvation involves the manward movement of God and the Godward movement of man effected in the incarnation. Christians participate in this double movement by the Spirit toward the

eschatological telos of theosis – human sharing in the divine life and love of God – Father, Son and Spirit (Habets, 2009:81, 112, 137, 151).

For Torrance, soteriology has the incarnation at its centre. An atonement centred exclusively in the cross is a truncated atonement. The union of God and man in the incarnation is fundamental to atonement. “The incarnation [is] seen to be essentially redemptive and redemption [is] seen to be inherently incarnational or ontological” (Torrance quoted in Vanhoozer, 2012:165). Thus the saving union secured by the incarnation is not merely external or forensic; it is ontological (Habets, 2009:106). Moreover, “it is not atonement that constitutes the goal and end of that integrated movement of reconciliation, but union with God in and through Jesus Christ” (Torrance quoted in Habets, 2009:106). Torrance presents the incarnation as redemptive in itself and the foundation for the goal of salvation, namely theosis.

Salvation as union works itself out with notable importance in Torrance’s doctrines of exchange and justification. In the ‘wonderful exchange’, Torrance adopts the positions of Gregory Nazianzen, Calvin and others to assert that Christ became what we are in order that we might become what he is. For Torrance, this governs the basic structure of the relationship between Christ and the believer (Habets, 2009:113). Torrance attacks theories of justification that focus exclusively on declaration and imputation as narrowly retrospective, and therefore worthy of the title “Latin heresy”. He proposes a doctrine of justification that captures the prospective aspects of salvation and includes deification and the impartation of righteousness. His position is captured by Habets (2009:120; emphasis added) as follows:

... Latin theology and its understanding of forensic justification has failed to comprehend the re-creation of the sinner... Justification is not just a cancellation of guilt and the bestowal of a new status. New status is achieved through union with Christ; it is the resurrection of the sinful flesh into the new life of Christ, and thus *the believer’s holiness is found in Christ’s*.

We share in Christ’s justification – justification is imparted to us as we are deified through our union with Christ.

In sum, union with Christ and the incarnation in particular dominate Torrance’s account of salvation. They play a similar role in his pneumatology and ecclesiology.

### **1.1.6 Torrance’s pneumatology**

In the theology of Thomas Torrance, the Holy Spirit effects union with Christ in the life of the individual Christian, within the corporate context of the church. The Spirit empowers the Son to make the wonderful exchange; unites the Christian to Christ and a share in the life of God; and binds believers in communion with God and with one another (Habets, 2009:139). The Spirit is

the “agent of participation”, responsible for mediating both the movement of God toward humanity and the movement of humanity back toward God (Habets, 2009:151). The Spirit is the “perfecting cause”, mediating contact between Father and Son in the Godhead, and between God and mankind in the world (Habets, 2009:146). Thus for Torrance the accent of the Spirit’s role in the transformation of a believer lies on enabling union with Christ and therefore participation in the objective truths of salvation. He is largely silent on the agency of the believer in transformation (Habets, 2009:151).

For Torrance, the church is an aspect of the Spirit’s work, but since the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and his work is never independent of Christ, the church remains the body of Christ, and not the body of the Spirit (Habets, 2009:140, 147, 165, 169). Sacraments, ministry and worship are marks of the church – the outward form of the union between Christ and his church realised by the Holy Spirit (Habets, 2009:166, 170).

The church is also the locus of the Spirit’s work in “creating and calling forth from humanity a response of faith and obedience in worship and prayer” with the purpose of bringing glory to God (Habets, 2009:166).

Torrance’s sacramental theology helps us to gauge what he understands by ‘human response’ (Torrance quoted in Habets, 2009:189; emphasis added):

In so far as the Eucharist is the act of the Church in his name and is also a human rite, it must be understood as an act of prayer, thanksgiving and worship... but as an act in which through the Spirit we are given to share in the vicarious life, faith, prayer, worship, thanksgiving and self-offering of Jesus Christ to the Father, *for in the final resort it is Jesus Christ himself who is our true worship.*

In the theology of Torrance, genuine Christian response is always passive, receptive, derivative, submissive, obedient, eucharistic and by grace from start to finish. It is “always Christ himself who is at work” (Torrance quoted in Habets, 2009:186). Indeed, something of the pervasive reach of participation in Torrance’s theology and its bearing on Christian agency is captured below (Torrance, 1992a:98):

... let me direct you to those striking words of St Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians, 2.20, which give succinct expression to the evangelical truth which we have been trying to clarify. ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith, the faithfulness of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.’ This is surely the insight that we must allow to inform all our human responses to God, whether they be in faith, conversion and personal decision, worship and prayer, the holy sacraments, or the proclamation of the Gospel: I yet not I but Christ’... this applies to the whole of my life in Christ and to all my human responses to God, for in Jesus Christ they are laid hold of, sanctified and informed by his vicarious

life of obedience and response to the Father. They are in fact so indissolubly united to the life of Jesus Christ which he lived out among us and which he has offered to the Father, as arising out of our human being and nature, that they are our responses toward the love of the Father poured out upon us through the mediation of the Son and in the unity of his Holy Spirit.

### **1.1.7 The entailments of Torrance's theology for the Christian life**

In his method, Torrance's realism sets him *ex ante* against any kind of dualism between Christ and the Christian in the Christian life (Stevick, 2015). An ethical outworking of the Latin heresy would be to allow loss of contact between the Christian and the real Christ, manifesting in external, symbolic or merely moral relations. Torrance's prior methodological commitments push him towards radical unity between Christ and the Christian in moral agency. Any truly ethical response is, on his view, a participation in the response of Christ.

The ethical implications of Torrance's anthropology are reflected in the following (Habets, 2009:34):

The *imago Dei* lies ahead of each human person and can only be realised in the person of the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. The *imago Dei* is our destiny and true telos, not something inherent within each human person, waiting to be realised through some self-effort, self-examination, process of spiritual awakening, or mysticism. The realising of the *imago Dei* is... within Torrance's theology... actioned entirely by grace.

Here we again encounter Torrance's emphasis on divine objectivity and divine agency over human agency (Habets, 2009:44, 46).

In his Christology, Torrance argues that Christ assumed a fallen human nature, which he then progressively sanctified in his sinless person to the point of perfect passive obedience. What follows is an extremely vicarious understanding of Christian sanctification. The believer's response in worship, obedience, faith or decision is essentially that of Christ. Anderson (2009:58), describes the practical outworkings of Torrance's Christology as follows:

The Holy Spirit mediates the very person of Christ to us, not merely the benefits of Christ's death. The whole of Christ's life of obedience, prayer and worship thus becomes the objective and ontological basis for the Christian life of faith.

This pattern is repeated in Torrance's soteriology. His understanding of justification as our ontological sharing in Christ's resurrected, justified flesh collapses sanctification into justification and thereby eclipses human agency in the process of Christian progress (Habets, 2009:118, 123).

All of these implicit entailments find explicit expression in Torrance's call for a "soteriological suspension of ethics" (quoted in Holmes, 2015:45).<sup>2</sup> The statement constituted a relocation of ethics within what Torrance deemed its only context of intelligibility, namely, the person and work of Christ. Ethics is the "fruit of our union with Christ" (Holmes, 2015:46) and "the inner content of justification" (Torrance quoted in Holmes, 2015:46). As outlined above, justification according to Torrance is both a declaration of righteousness and a making right in the sense of ongoing renewal. In fact, his stress is on the latter.

For Torrance, Christ's saving work and the Christian life are both grounded in the person of Christ and his filial relation with the Father. We share in his active obedience. We share in his whole life of obedient righteousness as the only-begotten Son of the Father. Atonement itself is *enhypostatic* (Holmes, 2015:54). It is the relation between the Father and the Son, culminating in the cross, the resurrection and the ascension, which becomes the basis of the ethical life. Ethics only has any meaning as the relation of the Son to the Father is translated into the life of the ordinary believer (Holmes, 2015:46–48). "Ethics is to be suspended until it can be placed within Jesus Christ" (Holmes, 2015:49). That happens in the power of the Spirit (Holmes, 2015:50).

Torrance's problem with modern Christian ethics was that it is all too often expounded apart from the ontology of Christ and the Christian, and apart from Trinitarian metaphysics. It is all too often expounded as an external, legal relation rather than the fruit of ontological union. In Christ, gospel and law co-inhere; being and act co-inhere. The goal of Christian ethics is that in him we become like him – our being and act converge. In the Christian there is a gap between being and act, is and ought, indicative and imperative; but that gap is closed in and because of Jesus Christ. We share "in his vicarious self-sanctification" (Torrance quoted in Holmes, 2015:53). The "full actualization" of redemption is "his business" (Holmes, 2015:53). "We cannot reconcile the *is* and the *ought*... we will only promote their estrangement" (Holmes, 2015:53).

Thus for Torrance the Christian life cannot be separated from the person of Christ and his atoning mediation, all in relation to the Father and the Spirit. Ethics as external or legal relation must be suspended until the primacy of this soteriological truth is established.

In these convictions, Torrance openly aligns himself with Athanasius, Bonhoeffer and Barth (Speidell, 2015:76, 79), to whom we might add Irenaeus, Cyril (Baker, 2010), Calvin (Heron, 2010)

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<sup>2</sup> The meaning of this statement is explored in 2.2.3. For now, suffice to say that Torrance is calling for the suspension of ethics where "ethics" describes an external legal moral order, or system of law-keeping. Instead, Torrance's soteriology of an atoning incarnation places the moral order on an ontological and filial basis in the person of Christ.

and a number of his Scottish peers and predecessors (Redman, 2010 and Fergusson, 2010) as secondary influences.

Torrance has allies, but he also has critics, to whom we now turn.

### **1.1.8 The critique of Thomas Torrance**

We will consider general criticism before we address specific attention to the ethical entailments of Torrance's theology.

Torrance has been criticised for allowing his methodological and axiomatic commitments to cloud his judgement. Baker (2010:42) questions whether his reading of the church fathers has been skewed by an "anti-dualist zeal" which moves him against dualism where there is in fact only duality. Moreover, in an essay on the work of Christ in patristic theology, Russell (2015:161–163) alludes to Greek fathers who make allowance for *external* participation and the *imitatio Christi*. The same unifying instinct in Torrance's epistemology "at times leads him to elide unity into pure identity" (Baker, 2010:42–43). The implications for his understanding of the Christian life are explored below.

In his Christology, Torrance is criticised for leaning too far towards Alexandria, underplaying the role of the Spirit, and making the human nature of Christ merely instrumental (Habets, 2009:71, 74). In his theories of 'total substitution' and the vicarious humanity of Christ, Torrance is accused of overreaching, so that faith is only properly exercised by Christ, and not by the believer (Habets, 2009:75). Macleod (2000:133–134) presses this line of criticism. Firstly, in his application to Christian worship (and by extension, to Christian ethics) Torrance confuses the role of the Son and the Spirit and so violates the New Testament's clear distinction between the two. Contra Torrance, in the New Testament the Spirit is not the "primary actor" in atonement, and the Son is not the "primary enabler" in the life of a believer (Macleod, 2000:133). Secondly, Torrance illegitimately extends the attribute of 'vicariousness' to the work of the Spirit. While Christ stands for us in atonement, the Spirit does not stand for us in faith – the Spirit does not believe on our behalf. The implication of Macleod's criticism is that, by overreaching in these ways, Torrance is in danger of voiding Christian agency.

In his soteriology, Torrance repeatedly rejects the idea that the believer is somehow divinised through participation in the divine nature (e.g., Habets, 2009:137, 138). He describes that union apophatically. He says of Christ and his church, for example, that "no union... could be closer without passing into absolute identity" (Torrance quoted in Habets, 2009:182). His critics ask how he keeps that particular dam wall from breaking (Lee cited in Habets, 2009:108). They ask the same question at the level of the individual: "what, if anything, must I *do* in order to participate?"

(Vanhoozer, 2012:166; emphasis in the original). In other words, the questions they ask are questions of Christian agency.

Vanhoozer (2012:170) argues that for a theory of atonement to be considered adequate it must explain the necessity of Jesus' suffering and death. Given Torrance's strong emphasis on the atoning nature of the incarnation, and his decision to jettison the wrath of God in that account (Habets, 2009:112), it is an open question whether his theory passes Vanhoozer's requirement for validity. Macleod (2000:132) is certain that any theory of incarnational redemption would fail such a test. He also asserts that Torrance has misread the church fathers, misunderstood union with Christ as ontological rather than spiritual, and completely contradicted the biblical emphasis on the cross (Macleod, 2000:131–132).

According to Habets (2009:124–125), Torrance's theory of justification downplays the forensic nature of justification to an extent which threatens "violence to the biblical text". His doctrine of justification has come in for severe criticism from Western theologians.

Habets (e.g., 2009:140, 145, 191, 195, 196) repeatedly makes the claim that Torrance's pneumatology is underdeveloped. There is a particularly problematic lacuna in the role of the Spirit in Christ's earthly ministry and, in a related way, in the earthly life of believers. As a result, the outworkings of the theology of participation, or theosis, in the Christian life are left implicit. Given Torrance's call for a suspension of ethics, this may have been deliberate. The question leads us to a tighter focus on the criticisms of Torrance's view of ethics and the Christian life.

In this study, I follow Speidell (2015), who presents John Webster as a foil to Torrance (see chapter 2). Webster (1986a:320, 314) has criticised those "strands of Protestant theology, in which justification virtually leaves sanctification, ecclesiology and ethics *in suspension*" (emphasis added), and where the primary concern is "above all, to defend a fully 'realist' or 'objective' conception of Christ's work".<sup>3</sup> Webster applauds what this "strand", and therefore Torrance, affirms, namely, the objective person and work of Christ as the ground and basis of the Christian life (see also Webster, 2016b:5–48). He is, however, critical of what Torrance denies, or at least omits – the *imitatio Christi*. Focussing entirely on the *participatio* to the exclusion of the *imitatio* has, according to Webster (1986b:105), a number of deleterious effects. It reduces the New Testament imperative to a bare acknowledgement of the lordship of Christ – in a word, "Believe!" Ironically, it is also ultimately idealist in that Christian morality is removed from ordinary Christian experience and set entirely on the mystical plane of our union with Christ, which offers no

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<sup>3</sup> While Webster does not name Torrance directly in this article (1986a), Speidell (2015:57, see also n. 4) offers evidence that he applied this same criticism to Torrance elsewhere.

substantive content or shape to Christian living. Equally ironic is the introduction of a new dualism with the separation of the person of the Christian and her works. The agency of the Christian collapses into the sole agency of Christ, and Christian responsibility all but vanishes.<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to Torrance, Webster (1986a:316; 2016b:114–115) argues that the inclusion of the *imitatio* into the *participatio* will remedy these problems. Our union with Christ is the origin and energy of Christian agency, and our imitation of Jesus is what gives it shape, content, and pattern. Imitation provides meaning to the New Testament imperatives, and significance to Christian agency as the proper derivative of the agency of Christ (Webster, 1986a:316).

## 1.2 The shape of the question

It is not my goal here to offer a comprehensive description and critique of the theology of Thomas Torrance. I merely present the contours of both insofar as they are relevant to Torrance's view of the Christian agency and ethics. Therefore we return to the specific critique at hand, towards distilling the research problem and the research question of this study.

How do we account for the difference between Torrance and Webster – respected British contemporaries in broad theological agreement? It is not as though a superficial reading of Scripture will decide the question. As Gorman (2015:80) says of the New Testament witness:

... for most NT writers, Christ's past activity... constitutes the essential structure of the moral life. This can be articulated in terms of discipleship and imitation, or in terms of indwelling and participation. In either case the goal is the expression of Jesus-like activity in the present.

What Gorman proposes above is true of Torrance and Webster. For both men, "Christ's past activity... constitutes the essential structure of the moral life." Torrance articulates this structure in terms of participation, and Webster in terms that include imitation. However, if Webster's critique of Torrance has any validity, choices around how to articulate the moral life have serious consequences. It matters whether you choose to emphasise Christian agency in imitation (e.g., Bolt, 2013; Tinsley, 1953) or the agency of Christ in participation (e.g., Proudfoot, 1963; Shuster, 1998). Even presenting the decision as a choice between imitation and participation has profound implications for the ordinary Christian, who simply must have an answer to the question, "How then shall we live?" Indeed, the differences between Torrance and Webster are significant enough, and the implications for faith and praxis profound enough, to require a deeper

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<sup>4</sup> This could well be an overreaction to the tendency of modern ethics to stress human agency in Christian morality. Even Stanley Hauerwas, himself an ardent critic of modern ethics, has never been able to escape this pitfall (Brock, 2012:295–296). It could be that Torrance and like-minded Protestant theologians of his era overreached in their response to this tendency. Part of this study seeks to decide that question.

examination into how conceptions of agency in participation and imitation interact in the traditions to which Torrance appeals and in the Scriptures themselves.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

How then shall we live? This is a question faced by every Christian and every Christian community. The modern discipline of ethics sought to answer it with little or no reference to the theology from which it emerged. Thomas Torrance corrected that error by stressing union with Christ as the determinative reality in the Christian life to the point of advocating a “soteriological suspension of ethics”. Webster (a representative critic) viewed Torrance’s position as an overreaction that ignored the *imitatio Christi* and impoverished the believer of vital resources required to answer the fundamental question. These two positions are clearly not identical. They are differentiated, to a large extent, by the emphasis assigned to the agency of Christ vis-à-vis the agency of the Christian in the Christian life. Torrance’s conception of participation stresses the agency of Christ. Webster’s conception of imitation reaffirms the agency of the Christian disciple. The gap between these two positions is the heart of the research problem this study hopes to address.

### **1.4 Research questions**

Further research questions arising from this problem statement are as follows:

1. How do agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the writings of Torrance and a representative critic like Webster?
2. How do agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the writings of those to whom Torrance appeals?
3. How do agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the Bible?
4. How is Torrance’s model (and Webster’s counterproposal) corrected and advanced by a re-reading of his own sources and Scripture?

### **1.5 Aim**

The primary aim of this study is to arrive at a biblical perspective of how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate, in conversation with Thomas Torrance and his interlocutors.

## 1.6 Objectives

Specific objectives include:

1. To describe and define how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the theologies of Torrance and a representative critic like Webster.
2. To determine how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the theologies of those to whom Torrance appeals and with whom he identifies.
3. To present a biblical perspective on how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate.
4. To evaluate Torrance's model (and Webster's counterproposal) on the basis of how his sources and the Bible define the function and relation of agency in participation and in imitation, and to suggest appropriate amendments.

## 1.7 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the Bible and, in part, the sources to which Torrance appeals hold agency in participation and in imitation in close relation, which is a significant advance on Torrance's almost exclusive focus on the agency of Christ in participation.

## 1.8 Methodology

The following methods will be employed to fulfil the aims and objectives outlined above:

The **first objective** is to describe how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the theology of Torrance, and in the theology of a representative critic, namely, Webster. Thus the method will be inductive and will involve a survey of the relevant writings of Torrance and, to a lesser extent, Webster.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In Torrance's case, representative treatments of the topic are found in *Royal Priesthood* (1955), *God and Rationality* (1971), and *The Mediation of Christ* (1992a). I discuss these works in some depth. I also refer extensively to *Theology in reconciliation* (1975), *The framework of belief* (1980a), *The Christian frame of mind* (1985), and *The atonement, the singularity of Christ and the finality of the cross* (1992b), amongst others. This remains a small sample of Torrance's extensive corpus. Nevertheless, since Torrance rarely addressed ethical issues explicitly (Speidell, 2015:56), a focussed study of his clearest writings on theological ethics is warranted. In arriving at my selection, I was guided by the secondary literature, and especially volume 5 of *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* (2015), which is devoted to ethical themes. Webster's position will be discerned from his two-part volume *God without measure* (2016a and 2016b), along with relevant journal articles.

The **second objective** is to determine how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the sources to which Torrance appeals, in order to assess the validity of his appeal. The method will need to be both inductive and deductive, as it will involve both description and critique. I will survey the relevant works and establish whether they are in agreement with the position Torrance takes as an advocate of those works.<sup>6</sup>

The **third objective** is to develop an understanding of how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the Bible. Here I propose to exegete a number of exemplary anchor texts which describe that function and relation, and to synthesise their message in order to formulate a biblical perspective.<sup>7</sup> I will employ the grammatical-historic exegetical method to this end.

An important rationale for employing the grammatical-historic exegetical method is that it was a necessary first step in Torrance's own hermeneutical method. Torrance was committed to "depth interpretation", or what we might, in current parlance, label a Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS; Webster, 2012:35n7, 49). Nevertheless, he insisted that (Torrance quoted in Webster, 2012:55, emphasis mine):

... we have to give the most rigorous attention to the actual text of the Scriptures and to their actual setting in history... Arduous exegetical study is the foundation for all theological discipline in the Church...

Contemporary scholars concur. Carson (2011) and Slade (2016) arrive at the same conclusion, albeit from different directions. Carson (2011) argues that TIS in its best and truest form is merely the outworking of thorough and responsible grammatical-historic exegesis. Slade (2016:17)

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<sup>6</sup> Russell (2015) shows how a number of the Eastern Greek fathers (to whom Torrance appeals in making his case for participation) employ imitation in their Christology. I plan to research his references to establish how the early church fathers understood participation and imitation. I will then be in a better position to gauge whether Torrance has given them full and fair treatment.

<sup>7</sup> A few clarifying comments are necessary. In this statement on methodology and the corresponding research questions, aim, objectives (§1.4–1.6) and chapter headings, I do not want to imply a number of overly ambitious claims. In the exegetical chapter (4), I am not attempting to arrive at an Old Testament, New Testament, or biblical ethic. I am not attempting to arrive at an *exhaustive* biblical account of how agency in imitation and in participation function and relate. I am attempting to gather, analyse and synthesise sufficient biblical data to arrive at a *biblical perspective* on this relationship – one that is robust and extensive enough to warrant serious consideration in an evaluation of Torrance's theological commentary on the topic. Whenever I refer to a "biblical perspective" or "biblical model", or to "what the Bible says", I intend such descriptors in this limited and yet, in my view, still highly significant sense. These considerations have motivated my selection of exemplary anchor texts. I have sought out a range of texts that 1) are important to Torrance or his representative critic (Webster) in formulating their positions, and/or 2) hold imitation and participation in close proximity, with a view to discerning if and how the two relate. I do not claim to have examined every text that meets these criteria, but only sufficient to decide the presence or absence of a pattern, and to describe that pattern, should one exist.

argues that grammatical-historic exegesis is necessary (though not sufficient) to a proper TIS. Slade (2016:17) approvingly quotes Enns, who emphasises:

A grammatical-historical reading... is not only permissible but absolutely vital... [to a TIS]

Both Carson (2011:189–190) and Slade (2016:17) argue that the shortcoming of grammatical-historic exegesis is not with the method itself but with the presupposition of philosophical naturalism that has often informed the application of the method.

Slade (2016:17, 24) in advocating TIS also argues that grammatical-historic exegesis is necessary as a control on “overly speculative and mystical translations”. In his critique, Webster (2012:58–63), who is otherwise broadly affirming of Torrance’s method, suggests that Torrance fails in precisely this area. He does not allow for a close enough connection between the syntax and the semantics. Webster (2012:62) offers this corrective:

... inquiry into the syntactical features of the text is not only a necessary condition for grasping its semantic features but is itself the means of discerning its semantics.

Thus it is in an effort to evaluate Torrance’s theological propositions by his own standards and methods that I will deploy the grammatical-historic exegetical method. Since his representative critic (Webster) evaluates Torrance by the same method, using the grammatical-historic exegetical method will have the further benefit of allowing me to assess the validity of Webster’s critique.

The **fourth objective** is to evaluate Torrance’s model (and Webster’s counterproposal) by the measure of the sources to which Torrance appeals and the Bible itself. Principles gleaned under objectives 2 and 3 will be used as criteria by which to evaluate his model. This will carry the study toward its overall aim, namely, offering a biblical advance, in dialogue with the relevant sources, on Torrance’s model. I hope to show that Torrance is judged, by the criteria of his own sources and the Bible, right in what he asserts regarding participation, but wrong in what he denies, omits, or underplays in imitation. This, of course, has implications for how we understand agency in the Christian life.

## **1.9 Classification of chapters**

Chapters will be organised according to the research questions and objectives outlined above.

Thus:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Participation, imitation and agency in Torrance, and in Webster as a representative critic

Chapter 3 – Participation, imitation and agency in Torrance's sources

Chapter 4 – A biblical perspective on participation, imitation and agency – an integrated model

Chapter 5 – Summary and conclusion

## CHAPTER 2: PARTICIPATION, IMITATION AND AGENCY IN TORRANCE, AND IN WEBSTER AS A REPRESENTATIVE CRITIC

### 2.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to describe how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the theology of Tom Torrance and a representative critic, John Webster.

Meeting this objective requires, in the first place, drilling down into Torrance's presuppositions, influences and methods, since these have such an important bearing on his theology. This involves exploring his dependence on the Greek fathers (Athanasius in particular), Karl Barth, Michael Polanyi and, briefly, Søren Kierkegaard. The influence of these thinkers will then be traced in the writings of Torrance himself. Special consideration must then be given to Torrance's controversial call for a "soteriological suspension of ethics". Finally, Torrance's position is examined through the lens of a representative critic in John Webster. The contrast will hopefully cast Torrance's thinking in starker relief.

Torrance (1985:6–12) argues that the Greek fathers stressed both "radical contingency" and providential rule over humanity towards the goal of communion with God – all as the context for affirming participation in Christ as the model for understanding Christian agency.<sup>8</sup>

Amongst the church fathers, Athanasius is granted special attention given his enormous influence on Torrance (e.g., Heron, 2009:6; Hunsinger, 2009:11; Molnar, 2009:84; Noble, 2013:15). According to Torrance (e.g., 1975:217–218), the overall thrust of Athanasius's work is toward integration, over against the cosmological and epistemological dualisms prevalent in his day. Athanasius stressed integration of method and content (Torrance, 1975:239). In method he advocated relating to God (*κατὰ φύσιν*) as God. In content he called for the incarnation to stand at the centre of all our knowing and being (e.g., Torrance, 1975:222–224). Method and content are integrated in that we know God only as he has revealed himself in the incarnate Christ. And since Athanasius stresses that we know God only as we relate to his objective reality appropriately, that is, in godliness, theology and ethics are also integrated; Christian thought and life are integrated (Torrance, 1975:263). Integration as a controlling theme in Athanasius lends itself to participation as an explanation of Christian transformation.

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<sup>8</sup> As explained below, I understand "radical contingency" in Torrance's reading of the church fathers to mean a strict adherence to the Creator–creation distinction and the total dependence of creation on the Creator. (Also refer to the glossary of technical terms above.)

Karl Barth had a profound influence on Torrance, who studied under him in Basle (Heron, 2009:6). Barth is important for at least two reasons. First, it is likely that as Torrance's doctoral supervisor he had some influence (how much is debatable) over Torrance's reading of the Greek fathers and Reformation theologians, like Calvin. Second, Torrance's own understanding of what he labels "the Latin heresy" is derived at least in part, it seems, from Barth's thinking on the matter (Torrance, 1990:213–240).<sup>9</sup> Barth, like Torrance, proposed the indivisible oneness of the being and agency of God as the only remedy to the dualisms introduced by the Latin heresy. On Torrance's (1990:234–236) reading of Barth, the indivisible oneness of God implies profound participation as the mode of relation between the Christian and Christ.

Michael Polanyi also had a significant influence (Heron, 2009:7). His strong advocacy for objective reality as the locus of our knowing stands right at the heart of Torrance's theological method, with profound implications for his ethics. In Christian theology and ethics, centring in an objective reality translates into participation in Christ.

After considering his presuppositions, influences and methods, I will move on to consider the results of that matrix in Torrance's theology and its relation to his ethics. *The Mediation of Christ* (1992a) shows how Torrance pits the integrating instincts of Athanasius and Polanyi against the dualisms of ancient Greece and the modern European analytical tradition. The incarnation is at the heart of both his method and its results. Jesus, by his hypostatic union with God and his atoning union with mankind, in his person establishes a new moral order in himself. Believers access that order by participation in him. Imitation is ruled out as an independent attempt to re-establish the old external moral order. Rather, for Torrance, every aspect of our response is a sharing in Christ and his perfect response to the Father.

In *Royal Priesthood* (1955), Torrance demonstrates how the vicarious priesthood of Christ, rooted as it is in the hypostatic union of his person, represents a mediating manward movement of God, but also a mediating Godward movement of man. Christ both mediates the Word of God to man and offers a priestly sacrifice as the perfect response of man to God. Christ is our response through his participation in us and ours in Him. We also gain, in *Royal Priesthood*, deep insight into the imitation that Torrance rejects. It is the Platonic notion of imitation as an earthly transcription of a heavenly reality that he so vehemently opposes. According to Torrance, authentic Christian response is by participation in the response of Jesus Christ, and not some contemporary reproduction of it with independent significance.

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<sup>9</sup> The Latin heresy is more fully defined in "Karl Barth and the Latin heresy" (2.2.1.3) below, and in the glossary of technical terms above.

In an essay titled “Cheap and costly grace” (1971) it becomes clear that much of what Torrance writes is polemic directed at a brand of Protestant theology epitomised by Bultmann. Against the subjective existentialism of Bultmann and others, Torrance proposes an unrelenting objectivity in epistemology, soteriology and ethics. This objectivity comes about through participation in Christ. Indeed, justification itself is not merely external and forensic; it describes an ontological union: a participation in the active obedience of Christ. This comes about by the uncompromising grace of God, which condemns human effort, and calls for “a displacement of the self by Christ” (Torrance, 1971:70). Torrance points to Bonhoeffer as an exemplar of someone who understood and embraced the full implications of justification by grace alone for human agency. In all this Torrance ignores the role of imitation, presumably on the grounds that it conceives of human agency in terms too close to subjective independence for his liking.

Torrance (1992b:252) uses the phrase “soteriological suspension of ethics” to describe the relation of the atonement to the moral order, or Christian ethics. In short, he advocates that the relation between the two is one of “suspension” – atonement suspends the moral order – but more needs to be said. Torrance (1992b:226–256) argues, against the dualisms of Western theology, that the atonement is unlimited (though not universal). Therefore the moral order falls within the compass of the atonement, and not the other way around. Moreover, the work of Christ falls within the compass of the person of Christ, and the two can never be separated. The atonement involves a revolution of the moral order in which moral life is no longer governed by the external standard of law, but by internal filial relation. Because it falls within the ambit of the atonement, the moral order is no longer governed by the imperatives of law, but rather by the indicatives of God’s love. For Torrance, by the Spirit of God, it is the Father–Son relation and not an ethical code that governs the Christian life.

From Kierkegaard’s use of the phrase “suspension of ethics”, Torrance borrows the idea of unmediated relation to the absolute, such that any intermediate in ethics or law is suspended. However, for Kierkegaard this comes through the subjective existential decision of faith, while for Torrance it comes through participation in the objective reality of Christ.

In this chapter I present John Webster as a useful foil to Torrance. They share the same Protestant persuasion, and both were influenced by Karl Barth. Nevertheless, Webster takes contrasting positions in a few key areas, which throws Torrance into stark relief. By way of contrast Webster gives deeper insight into Torrance’s theology in general and his doctrine of participation in particular. All of this is explored in some detail below.

## 2.2 Torrance

### 2.2.1 Torrance: presuppositions, influences and methods

#### 2.2.1.1 The influence of the Greek fathers

I have already mentioned the influence of the Eastern Greek fathers on the theology of Thomas Torrance. Here we briefly investigate the nature of that influence on his presuppositional and methodological framework, and how it impacts the question at hand. In chapter one of *The Christian Frame of Mind* Torrance (1985:5) sets out to trace “the pattern of the Greek Christian mind which has so profoundly influenced our western tradition”. He does so by examining the teaching of the Three Hierarchs of the Eastern Church: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom. To these three “great Doctors”, Torrance (1985:6) adds a fourth, Athanasius, whom he judges as seminal to the thinking of Basil.

The first principle Torrance (1985:6) derives from the teaching Athanasius, as taken up by Basil, is that of the radical contingency of the created order on its Creator God. The second principle is that the Word of God constitutes the source and ground of any order in the cosmos. The Word of God is, to borrow from modern scientific parlance, the “cosmological constant” (Torrance, 1985:7). The third principle, which balances and complements the first, is the unique and elevated position of man in the created order. Thus (Torrance, 1985:7):

Man is a creature who belongs in body and mind to the realm of contingent being, but he has been made to ‘look up’ to God, and thus to be that rational constituent of the creation in whom the secret of its purpose in the loving providence of God is lodged. It is in and through man and his peculiar place in the cosmos, therefore, on the boundary between heaven and earth, the divine and the creaturely, the invisible and the visible, that its real destiny will be disclosed.

However, in the balance between contingency and rational agency, it is clear that Torrance (1985:7; emphasis mine) places weight on the former:

Essential to this cosmological outlook lies the Christian concept of the *radical contingency* of the universe and its rational order. And central to all that is the conception, so impossible for the ancient Greeks, of the contingent nature of the human mind created by God out of nothing but given a unique relation to his own transcendent Mind *through grace*.

Gregory Nazianzen, according to Torrance (1985:8–11), adds the alienation of sin to created contingency. In other words, we are utterly dependent on God, not only in our created contingency, but in our need for redemption from sin. Nazianzen argued (contra Apollinaris) that Jesus assumed a human mind in order to heal it. Torrance controversially extrapolates that to

imply that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature.<sup>10</sup> This, he argues (Torrance, 1985:9–10), is a point missed by Latin theology, which treats the human nature of Christ as merely an instrument for his saving work, with a number of adverse consequences. These include “the formulation of a doctrine of atonement largely in terms of juridical relations” – a formula Torrance (1985:10) sees repeated in the Western account of ethics and the Christian life. That said, the particular point he wishes to stress here is that the fall affected the human mind, and our contingency extends to the need for redemption (Torrance, 1985:9):

The Christian mind is not merely the mind that knows itself to be utterly contingent upon God, but the healed mind, the mind that is reconciled to God through the saving and sanctifying life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The absence of this doctrine of a fallen human mind “opened the door to pre-Christian Greek rationalism that has affected... western theology” (Torrance, 1985:10).

One of Chrysostom’s great contributions, for our purposes, was to highlight that what is true of the natural and rational orders is also true of the moral order, since the two are inextricably intertwined (Torrance, 1985:12). Thus, by deduction, the moral order is also radically contingent and in need of redemption. Chrysostom also expounded contingency in terms of divine providence, over against Greek philosophical notions of accident or chance. By God’s providential overruling, all created order, including the moral order, has a telos: human communion with God (Torrance, 1985:12).

In Torrance’s (1985:12) description of Chrysostom’s doctrine of providence, it is clear that, while ultimate agency belongs exclusively to God, this need not imply the dissolution of human responsibility:

... the natural order is unceasingly contingent on God in such a way that he not only upholds and sustains it in its creaturely reality, but makes its coherent arrangement serve his supreme purpose in the communion of the creation with the Creator... This deletion of the notion of accident or chance by the Christian concept of contingent order under God, carried with it the idea of an overall moral perspective in which the good is blessed and evil falls under judgment...

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<sup>10</sup> At this point, it is worth briefly reviewing the overlap between Torrance’s cosmology, soteriology, anthropology and Christology. He argues that in assuming a human nature, Christ “proleptically” conditioned all of Creation in general, and human nature in particular. That is, in Christ, Redemption conditioned Creation, rather than vice versa. The Incarnate Christ is the *imago Dei* in which pre-fall Adam and Eve participated, from which they fell, to which humankind is restored, and into which the Redeemed grow from one degree of glory to another towards the telos of humanity, namely, theosis (Habets, 2009:22–37).

All the elements of a Reformed orthodox doctrine of providence appear here: provision, concurrence, government (Bavinck, 2004:595–598). God's relation to the created order is such that his sovereignty does not crush human moral agency. While Torrance's precis of Chrysostom is overwhelmingly affirmative, he does not appear to integrate explicitly all the elements of the great Doctor's doctrine of providence into his account of the Christian life. We will return to this observation at a later stage.

Finally, it is important to note that Torrance (1985:13) presents Chrysostom's understanding of moral transformation as one of participation in Christ. And yet, in this account he cannot avoid the language of imitation. Not only is the mind of Christ "absorbed"; it is also "exhibited" and "assimilated". "Exhibited" implies external replication; "assimilated" implies learnt behaviour. Both are closer in meaning to imitation than Torrance would perhaps like.

From his survey of the Eastern Hierarchs and their influence on the Christian frame of mind, we can derive certain presuppositional and methodological influences that are evident, to a greater or lesser extent, in Torrance's discussion of transformation in the Christian life. They might be summarised as such: All of creation, including the moral order, is radically contingent on God and in need of redemption in Christ. This contingency is to be understood in terms of God's providential rule towards the telos of communion with Him. Human transformation under that rule is a function of participation in Christ.

### **2.2.1.2 The influence of Athanasius**

We must give further attention to the influence of Athanasius on Thomas Torrance. In a study of Athanasius, Torrance (1975:264–266) concludes that his profound influence on theological method in the church, and on scientific method more broadly, persists into the modern era. He suggests that many of our problems are the same, and he advocates the methods of Athanasius as fit for the task. And since for Athanasius method and content "always go together" (Torrance, 1975:239), by the evidence of his advocacy, the profound influence of Athanasius extends to Torrance himself, in both method and content. Indeed, some consider his agreement with Athanasius virtually comprehensive (e.g., Noble, 2013:15). I review some of the elements of Athanasius's influence below, especially as they pertain to agency in the Christian life.

Torrance (1975:215–218) identifies three primary influences on Athanasius: the tradition of Irenaeus; the Episcopal tradition in Alexandria; and the scientific tradition in Alexandria (mediated to him by Clement and Origen in particular). Irenaeus endowed Athanasius with a biblical-theological understanding of the gospel. The Episcopal school instilled in him a Hebraic worldview

and left little room for prevailing Hellenism. The Alexandrian scientific tradition left him with a sophisticated philosophy of science and a nuanced understanding of method.

Clement had taught that there were two methods of demonstration: logical deduction of the kind employed in geometry, and “a different kind of demonstration in which through questioning we allow our minds to fall under the compelling evidence of the *reality of things*” (Torrance, 1975:216; emphasis mine). Athanasius would give priority to the latter.

Origen introduced a deeper epistemological revolution (Torrance, 1975:217–218). Greek philosophy held that knowledge is restricted to the finite, since human beings are finite. If God is infinite, either we cannot know him, or our knowledge is restricted to finite gods. Origen conceded that our knowledge is finite, but argued that the infinite Creator God created all space–time *ex nihilo* and imbued it with an innate order that is intelligible to human knowing.

Torrance (1975:218) describes how Athanasius took up these various threads by, in the first place, rejecting the Hellenistic doctrines of cosmological and epistemological dualism, and the ultra-transcendentalist Platonic doctrine of God (Torrance, 1975:217). Instead, in terms later adopted by the three Eastern Hierarchs, Athanasius posited, according to Torrance (1975:219):

... the transcendent Being of God the Creator who is actively, creatively present in all that he has made, upholding it by the Word of his power and by his Spirit. God creates all things through the Logos, his own eternal Son, and continuously maintains them in their created being so that they do not lapse back into nothing. All created existence is brought into being by the grace and pleasure of God, by God’s Creative power and will, as entirely other than God, and yet continuously dependent upon the gift of his grace. That applies no less to the invisible realm of rational souls than to the visible realm of phenomena. And to all that he has made God assigns its proper order and function, thus conferring upon contingent existence an inherent intelligibility through his creative Logos, who is the one fountain and source of all the rationality that pervades the created cosmos.

Athanasius conceives of God as transcendent in being and yet immanent in Providence. The relation of the creation to Creator is one of contingency – utter dependence on the grace of God. Torrance (1975:219) adds this striking description of Athanasius’s qualification to maintain the Creator–creature distinction:

That is not to say that the rationality of creatures, things or souls, is an uncreated participation in the transcendent Rationality of God, or even a mimesis of that Rationality in some sort of Platonic *μέθεξις* for it is a participation only by God’s grace...

Thus, in characterising the creature–Creator relation in Athanasius, Torrance rejects Platonic imitation or participation by nature in favour of participation by grace alone. This is, of course, the heart of Torrance’s own depiction of the creature–Creator relation.

We turn now to Athanasius’s theology proper, as Torrance (1975:220–224) understood it. In his doctrine of God, Athanasius struggled against Aristotelian and Stoic error, for a sharp distinction between Creator and creation, between theology and cosmology. He also struggled against Platonic error, and for the constant gracious immanence of God in upholding and ordering his contingent creation. In this way he dispatched the prevailing cosmological and epistemological dualisms. Thus, according to Torrance, Athanasius argued that we do not know God apart from his relation to creation. Yet, our knowledge is not a logical inference from creation, but rather creation is the medium of his self-revelation.

For Torrance (1975:222–223), this understanding of the Creator–creature relation has two profound implications for Athanasius’s doctrine of God. The first is the fundamental importance of the incarnation to epistemology: “Through the Inhomination of the Word the universal Providence has been made known, and the Leader and Maker of all things, the Word of God himself” (Athanasius quoted in Torrance, 1975:223). The second is the fundamental importance of the internal relations of God to epistemology. Because we know God through the mutual Father–Son, Son–Father relation of knowing and being, our knowledge of God has an objective anchor in the concrete historical relation of the incarnate Son to God the Father. Thus the objective ground of this knowledge is within the being of God himself. Third is the importance of the incarnation to understanding the divine relation of being and act. The incarnation demonstrates that “God is so wonderfully and transcendently free in his being that he can do something new without ceasing to be what he is eternally in himself...” (Torrance, 1975:224). In other words, God’s act “inheres” in his being. Thus, by Torrance’s reckoning, Athanasius contradicts that later theology which distinguished God in his essence from God in his energies, and incorporated Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover into its doctrine of divine immutability.<sup>11</sup>

According to Torrance, the incarnation, which maintains both divine transcendence and divine immanence, has pride of place in Athanasius’s doctrine of God. It is also an appropriate segue into his doctrine of the incarnate Son. Indeed, the cosmological and epistemological dualisms which Athanasius rejects in his doctrine of God he also rejects in his doctrine of the Son (Torrance, 1975:224–226).

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<sup>11</sup> Cvetkovic (2013:81ff.) challenges Torrance’s reading of Athanasius at this point. He argues that Athanasius is in agreement with those later theologians who drew a distinction between God’s essence and his energies.

Torrance (1975:226–231) emphasises the following aspects of Athanasius’s doctrine of Christ. First, the Logos is intrinsic to the being of God and of one being (*homoousion*) with the Father.<sup>12</sup> Second, the Logos came both *in man* and *as man*. This describes “his wholeness and integrity as human being” (Torrance, 1975:227) such that he is simultaneously *homoousion* with the Father and with mankind. The incarnation moved Athanasius to conceive of God as becoming what he was not, while remaining what he eternally is. In other words, for Athanasius, the doctrine of the incarnation and the doctrine of God affect and interpret each other.<sup>13</sup> Third, *God as man* implies in Jesus Christ a deeply vicarious humanity. Jesus assumed our humanity in all its weakness and sin.<sup>14</sup> But the vicarious nature of the incarnation does not run only in one direction. In it Jesus was ministering God to man, and man to God. Athanasius understood the saving work of Christ “in terms of his *human* as well as his divine agency” (Torrance, 1975:228; emphasis original). Torrance (1975:229) comments further that in the teaching of Athanasius “the humanity of Christ is expounded at length in terms of his life and death... in our place and on our behalf, in such a way that our human being is renewed and sanctified in Jesus Christ himself”. This surely forms the basis of Torrance’s own conception of the Christian life as participation in the human agency of Christ. It is an aspect of Athanasian teaching that he finds missing in patristic scholarship. Fourth, because of its vicarious nature, the saving work of Christ takes place in his person, and not merely on the basis of his external relations with sinners. “The Saviour having in very truth become man, the salvation of the whole man was brought about...” (Athanasius quoted in Torrance, 1975:229). Torrance (1975:230) argues that this position is in sharp contrast to that of the Western church, and of later Protestantism:

In the Western Church, owing partly to the reintroduction of dualism into theology through St Augustine, and partly to the anthropocentric and forensic cast of mind deriving from Tertullian, the doctrine of redemption tends to be expounded in terms of external relations between Christ and sinful people, and so the judicial element assumes a role of predominant significance. It is even more pronounced in Protestant theology, where the rehabilitation of Augustinian dualism, in the new dynamic outlook of the post-Reformation world, led to an increasing number of monographs on the atonement. That sort of thing did not, and could not, arise in Greek patristic theology because in its nondualist outlook incarnation and redemption are inseparably one. For Athanasius, it is

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<sup>12</sup> Cvetkovic (2013:84–85) criticises and contests Torrance’s attempt to make *homoousion* the “controlling centre” of Athanasius’ theology.

<sup>13</sup> Cvetkovic (2013:85) argues that Torrance’s claim is anachronistic. The mode of thought had not developed to the extent Torrance’s claims require during Athanasius’s writing career.

<sup>14</sup> Walker (2012:33n109) points to the patristic citations Torrance presents in favour of the view that Christ assumed our post-lapsarian sinful human nature. Walker adds a quote from *Contra Arianos* that strongly suggests Athanasius held the same view (see also Torrance quoted in Noble, 2013:22–23). On the contrary, there are those who criticise Athanasius for giving an account of the incarnation in which Christ does not fully assume human nature and is therefore deprived of truly human agency (Cvetkovic, 2013:61–62). Again, Torrance’s reading of Athanasius is clearly contested.

everywhere apparent, the incarnational assumption of our fallen Adamic humanity from the Virgin Mary was essentially a sanctifying and redeeming event, for what Christ took up into himself, the whole man, he healed and renewed through his own holy life of obedient Sonship in the flesh, and his vicarious death and resurrection.

The soteriology of Athanasius does not end with the resurrection. We are made sons of God by grace through our union with he who is the Son of God by nature. We are exalted to the extent he condescended. This full account of salvation ending in our exaltation into the life of God Athanasius calls *theosis* – a doctrine which, as we have already seen, is very important to Torrance (Habets, 2009). As Torrance himself puts it (1975:231):

... all is understood as having taken place within the incarnate life of the Mediator, in whom and in whose saving work we are given to participate in the Spirit who is regarded as co-active in the Son in all acts of redemption and sanctification as well as all acts of creation.

It is easy to surmise how this Christology and soteriology might form the foundation of Torrance's own understanding of Christian agency as participation in Christ.<sup>15</sup> This is reinforced by the pneumatology of Athanasius.

In his doctrine of the Spirit, Athanasius remains in step with his doctrine of God and his doctrine of the Son. Over against Greek notions beginning with the Spirit's operations in the world (a pneumatology from below), Athanasius locates the Spirit on the divine side of the Creator–creature divide, within the being of God. And once again, we know the Spirit by his relation to the Godhead, and especially the Son, in being and act: "The Spirit is not outside the Word, but being in the Word, is in God through Him" (Athanasius quoted in Torrance, 1975:231–232). Moreover, "It is one God who works all things in all" (Torrance, 1975:230). The mutual indwelling of the Father, Son and Spirit in being and act is what allows us to participate in God by the Spirit (*theosis*). The Spirit is *homoousion* with the Father and the Son.<sup>16</sup> The Spirit is also one with the Father and the Son in all the acts of the Godhead. Thus we know and have fellowship with the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. Participation in the Father comes through the Son and in the Spirit.

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<sup>15</sup> Cvetkovic, on the other hand, presents a reading of Athanasius that stresses participation but also accommodates imitation. In describing Athanasius, he writes it is "only by following in Christ's footsteps" and "... by being led by Christ's example [that] the restored human rationality realizes [its] purpose" (Cvetkovic, 2013:70). And again, in a statement that affirms Christian agency: "deification... does not only mean that human beings are called to become gods, but also requires their active participation in the very process of being made gods themselves" (Cvetkovic, 2013:89).

<sup>16</sup> As mentioned above, Cvetkovic (2013:85) considers an anachronism Torrance's ascription to Athanasius of the concepts of *homoousion* and *perichoresis* at this level of development.

To this basic doctrine of the Spirit, Torrance (1975:234–239) adds three “elucidatory comments”. First, the Spirit’s indwelling in the Son and with the Son in God implies that in the Spirit we are in God. Therefore, Athanasius’s doctrine of the Spirit and his account of Christian participation are objectively anchored in the being of God. His doctrine disqualifies the subjectification of the Spirit so prevalent in modern theology (e.g., Schleiermacher, Troeltsch and Bultmann, according to Work, 2012:224–225). Moreover, the mutual relation of the Son and the Spirit also implies that the incarnation is essential to our receiving the Spirit. Our receiving of the Spirit is grounded in Christ’s and “is not a different receiving of the Spirit from his” (Torrance, 1975:235). Once again, the incarnation has pride of place and a profound impact on our understanding of participation in Athanasius’s theology. Second, the essential unity of being and act in this doctrine of the Spirit implies a dynamic conception of the immutable being of God. Movement is ever essential to the unchangeable being of God. Thus the incarnation was not accidental to God, but the “outgoing movement of the divine being in condescension and love” (Torrance, 1975:237). On Torrance’s (1975:235–237) reading of Athanasius, separating the essence of God from his energies undermines unity in the Godhead and implies that the incarnation and the spiration are unreliable manifestations of who God is in essence. Therefore, the condescension of God in the incarnation and the spiration cannot simply be what God *does*, they are who God *is*.<sup>17</sup> Third, the consequence thereof is that, even in his divine ineffability, God is open to us. Given the unity of divine being and act, by acting towards us through his Son and in his Spirit, God is making himself accessible in his being. He communicates his being to us so that we participate in him. That said, his communication is received in partial apprehension rather than exhaustive comprehension, given the nature of the Creator–creature divide. Moreover, it is only in the Spirit and by grace that we are made to participate in the Son, and through him the Father, in this way. Theosis, by which we, while remaining creatures, participate in God by God the Spirit, relativises all external relations, since the Spirit is internal to God. Here the human response is described as an in-Spirited “movement on our part to the Father and through the Son... answering to the movement on God’s part from the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit” (Athanasius cited in Torrance, 1975:239).

Next, Torrance turns to Athanasius’s method, without departing from his theology, since for Athanasius method and content are inseparable. That they are inseparable is because in the incarnation God communicated himself, so the ‘how?’ and ‘who?’ of our knowing are one and the

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<sup>17</sup> Dragas (2013:43; cf. Farrow, 2013), an Eastern Orthodox theologian who is broadly appreciative of Torrance, openly contradicts Torrance’s reading of Athanasius as it pertains to the being and act of God. He argues that Athanasius himself followed what he considers a virtual consensus amongst the church fathers from both East and West in acknowledging a distinction between God’s essence and his energies.

same. We know God through the Son and in the Spirit; we know God as the Son and in the Spirit. Our knowledge of God rests in the objective reality of the Father, Son and Spirit. When God the Son entered into our humanity, he became the means by which we know God (by grace and in the Spirit), and the objective reality of that knowledge. The objective reality of the Father through the Son in the Spirit is both the method and the content of our knowledge of God (Torrance, 1975:239). In the incarnation of the Creator Logos, Jesus Christ validates human nature and upholds the “created intelligibility of contingent existence” (Torrance, 1975:240). He becomes human without collapsing humanity, and thus affirms the Creator–creature divide. He nevertheless also opens the way for the human knower to the objective reality of God, through his “hypostatic self-communication” (Torrance, 1975:239).<sup>18</sup> In the incarnation, he destroys all possibility of ontological monism or dualism in cosmology and epistemology. We know God neither by becoming divine ourselves, nor by being left to ourselves in creaturely isolation, but by gracious participation in God.

From these preliminary remarks, it is clear that two basic principles govern Athanasius’s method, in dialogue as they are with his theology. First, all knowing is ordered by the reality of the object of inquiry. The scientific tradition in Alexandria that so influenced Athanasius described this as knowledge *κατὰ φύσιν* (according to nature) of the object. Thus any attempt to know God must be conditioned by, and appropriate to, the objective reality of God (Torrance, 1975:241). Second, in the process of investigation *κατὰ φύσιν*, a controlling factor or coordinate emerges which then orders further investigation. When it comes to the objective reality of God, Athanasius judges this controlling factor to be the incarnation. Since the two principles are bound up in each other, we attend to each in turn and also to the relation between the two.

Torrance (1975:259–260) describes the Athanasian *κατὰ φύσιν* principle as follows:

... we must allow the distinctive nature (*φύσις*) of what we are thinking about to determine what are the suitable or fitting connections in terms of which we may interpret it aright. Theology that proceeds strictly by thinking *κατὰ φύσιν* of God in his economic condescension to us in Jesus Christ, cannot proceed by determining certain fixed positions and then arguing deductively from them as axioms in the old Euclidean or Aristotelian way for that would involve operating with a kind of necessity which is alien to the nature of God and the activity of his Spirit.

There are two noteworthy parts to this description. First, by way of *κατὰ φύσιν* the incarnation (“economic condescension” in Christ) emerges as the focus. Second, attempting to know God

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<sup>18</sup> Cvetkovic (2013:90–91) queries how far Athanasius allows human knowledge to penetrate the essence of God, and points to others who raise similar queries.

κατὰ φύσιν is incompatible with Greek methods of axiomatic logical construction because of who God is. Reality determines method. Method cannot be divorced from content. And what is true at large is true at the level of semantics. Athanasius adopted a rule that the meanings of words are subject to the reality they convey, rather than vice versa. Thus the boundaries of semantic domains are given an elastic nature by the realities to which they are being applied (Torrance, 1975:241–246).

Torrance (1975:261; emphasis original) goes on to offer a fuller description of Athanasius’s method:

His method was to direct questions hard upon each other, questions which become continuously refined and more penetrating in the process, before which the nature of things becomes disclosed in their own empirical and objective reality and in their inner relations, and which are progressively brought to expression and articulation in appropriate forms of thought adapted from or coined out of ordinary forms of thought and speech... Such a method does mean that theological activity must elbow its way, as it were, through a crowd of ordinary concepts and presuppositions which obscure the nature of reality of the field in question, until it comes up against the ultimately *simple but profound pattern of the truth in its own self-evidence*, which then becomes the controlling factor in theological construction.

In attempting to know God in the self-disclosure of his objective reality, a “controlling factor” emerges. As stated above, for Athanasius this was the incarnation. Torrance describes the incarnation as the controlling factor in Athanasius’s theological method variously as “the point of central reference”; the “*skopos*” (1975:256); the “key for deeper theoretic insight” (1975:258); the “essential pattern of truth” (1975:260); and the “inner reason” (1975:261). The incarnation is the controlling factor in our knowledge of God such that theology proceeds “from discerning the orderly structure of the saving economy” in the incarnate Son, to inner relations in the being of God (Torrance, 1975:250). Christ is the key to our knowledge of God. He is also the key to our knowledge of the cosmos. The rational structure which God spoke into his contingent creation has its source in the creative Logos. And so the incarnate Son of God stands at the centre of the creation. He therefore stands at the centre of our creaturely knowledge of God and our knowledge of the cosmos he has created, unifying and ordering both. Torrance (1975:258) makes the point as follows:

The entire universe of visible and invisible, celestial and terrestrial, realities is a cosmic unity due to the all-embracing providential and integrating activity of the divine Logos, so that a single rational order pervades all created existence contingent upon the transcendent rationality of God, the Lord of creation who is himself beyond all created being...

Man himself is a part of the whole cosmos, so that when the Logos became incarnate in man, God revealed himself through a part of the whole, and thus provided not only the essential clue for our understanding of the relation of God to the world in the light of his redeeming and renewing activity in Jesus Christ, but also the essential way of truth along which we may travel in knowing the invisible Father himself. And so Athanasius set himself to the distinctively theological task of inquiring into the ordering force and distinctive pattern of grace manifested in the life and work of the Incarnate Logos in order to learn from the Logos himself, as far as it is possible for human nature, the inner movement and reason for God's redeeming and renewing activity in the cosmos.

Here we have a typical Athanasian marriage of method and content: the incarnation is the ordering principle of our knowledge because it is the ordering principle of all created reality. He is both who we know and how we know.<sup>19</sup>

The Athanasian method, as far as Torrance understood it, has *κατὰ φύσιν* as its circumference and the incarnation as its centre. The integration of these two principles is the integration of method and content. In fact, integration is the overall theme and thrust in Athanasius, according to Torrance. As such, his thought amounted to a subversion of the cosmological and epistemological dualisms that prevailed in his day and persist to this day. Moreover, Athanasius was clear that integration extended to unity of thought and life. His method could not be practised apart from a godly life. It had to be experienced in the holy life of faith (Torrance, 1975:248, 263). His was an approach that integrated theology and ethics. For Athanasius, the Christian response issues out of relating to God as God and holding the person of the incarnate Christ at the centre. Indeed, Torrance (1975:266) concludes the discussion by proclaiming the Athanasian approach as the path to a “profounder integration of human life and thought”. It was certainly a path Torrance himself travelled. As we shall see, Athanasius reverberates throughout his own writings, in method and content. As we shall also see, and have already seen, Torrance's interpretation of Athanasius is open to challenge in ways that are material to this study.

### **2.2.1.3 Karl Barth and the Latin heresy**

In his book *Karl Barth, biblical and evangelical theologian* (1990), Torrance dedicates a chapter to “Karl Barth and the Latin heresy”. It is an important chapter for our purposes since an

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<sup>19</sup> Despite the heavy emphasis on the incarnate Christ, Torrance (1975:251–253) argues that Athanasius's theology is both Christocentric and Theocentric. He concedes the obvious centrality of Christ but argues that the incarnation leads us into the inner relations of God, that the Athanasian theology is “a theology directed to the Father through the Son”. As we shall see, Torrance's own critics charge him with an overemphasis on the Son.

understanding of both Karl Barth and the Latin heresy is necessary to an understanding of Torrance, and particularly his view of Christian agency.

Torrance begins the chapter with a brief summary of the method and theology of Athanasius. It is significant since Torrance places himself in what he views as a theological trajectory beginning with Irenaeus and running through Athanasius, Calvin (referenced throughout the chapter) and Barth, amongst others.

Torrance (1990:214) summarises Athanasius as follows. Our knowledge of God is of divine revelation in a movement from the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, and the “answering movement” of faith in the Spirit, through the Son, and to Father. Therefore we know God through internal rather than external relations, and our knowledge of God is simultaneously Trinitarian and Christocentric. It centres on Christ because by him we know the Father and receive the Spirit. Thus “everything depends on the indivisible inner relation in being of the Son and the Spirit to the Father” captured in the doctrine of the *homoousion*, which Athanasius propagated and defended so vigorously. These are fundamental tenets of the Athanasian theology which Torrance proposes as the foundation of Barth’s thinking and Barth’s attack on the Latin heresy.<sup>20</sup>

“The indivisible oneness of [divine] being and agency” was at the heart of Barth’s theological struggle (Torrance, 1990:215). Torrance (1990:214–15) points out that as a root cause of contention it had a long history. In the fourth century it manifested in controversy over the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit – were they divided from the being and agency of the Father? In the sixteenth century it surfaced in controversy over the doctrine of grace and the relation of the gift to the giver – was the gift other than the Giver? In Barth’s own day, it resurfaced in controversy over the nature and content of divine revelation – was revelation other than the Revealer?

Barth, like Athanasius and the Reformers before him, contended for *homoousion* – “indivisible oneness in being and agency” or “the Godness of God” (Torrance, 1990:215). As indicated, he contended against what Torrance later called “the Latin heresy”. For Torrance, the Latin heresy describes what he saw as a fundamental dualism that emerged in Greek philosophy and passed through the likes of Augustine, Descartes, Newton and Kant to become the intellectual and cultural heritage of the West in general, and especially the church. It is a partitive habit of thought that separates the Son from the Father and the Word from God, so that they are related only externally or symbolically, and not in their being and agency. Barth’s particular encounter with the

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<sup>20</sup> Farrow (2013), who is broadly appreciative of Barth and Torrance, refutes the account of the Latin heresy in both. He argues that they have “misdiagnosed the problem and misconstrued the solution”. While dualism is a problem in Catholic and Protestant theology, Torrance and Barth have overstated its prevalence. Moreover, their solution in ontological actualism is a “theological oversteer” that tends towards occasionalism and has a number of perverse consequences.

Latin heresy in the doctrine of revelation alerted him to the fact that this mode of thinking in Aristotelian, abstractive, formal and therefore external relations was pervasive in the theology of the Western Church, whether Roman Catholic, Neo-Protestant or Protestant orthodox.

Torrance (1990:216–217) traces the Latin heresy as a phenomenon in the church back to Arius. Arius operated under the assumption of twin cosmological and epistemological dualisms, which made direct interface between Creator and creature impossible and forced him to an understanding of Christological ontology within created reality, external to the being and agency of God. The Nicene Council responded with *homoousion tō Patri*, but the Latin heresy in its Arian guise persisted. Athanasius soon realised that the implications were not just Trinitarian and Christological, but also profoundly soteriological. If the Son relates to the Father only morally or symbolically, rather than ontologically, there are serious consequences, for any relation would therefore be merely external, bringing its saving power into question.

It is in the practice and advocacy of thinking in terms of internal relations rather than external relations that Torrance (1990:217) sees deep resonance between Athanasius and Barth, and deep dissonance with much of Western theology. Both men recognised ‘Jesus Christ as one in being and agency with God’ as a truth that must permeate and govern everything else in the Christian faith. On the contrary, a theology based on external relations is a very different theology. It is on this position in Barth, and the contra-position in the Latin heresy, that Torrance focusses his attention. He takes the doctrines of revelation and reconciliation as exemplary.

Barth’s doctrine of revelation can be reduced to the single statement “God reveals himself as Lord”. Or, in other words, “God’s revelation is God himself” (Torrance, 1990:218). There is no intermediate (external) substance or emanation by which God reveals himself. In the incarnation and the sending of his Spirit, God reveals himself. What God is in the saving economy of his Son and his Spirit, he is in his internal being and relations. We know God, in his being, by the Son and the Spirit, who are one in being and agency with the Father. Truth, therefore, cannot be abstracted from the person of Jesus Christ, and this, according to Barth, is precisely the error into which Western theology repeatedly falls (Torrance, 1990:220). The truth of theology itself is derivative and relative to the ultimate truth of God in Christ. These insights were the basis of Barth’s method in theology.<sup>21</sup> He held that “dogmatics must build recognition of its own inadequacy into its basic structure” because it is God himself who is the object of our knowledge.

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<sup>21</sup> Farrow (2013) argues that Barth overreaches and conflates divine being and agency with a number of erroneous consequences that permeate his presentation of the Latin heresy. Dragas (2013) and Cvetkovic (2013), who are cited above, criticise Torrance along similar lines.

Over against Barth's doctrine of revelation stood the Latin heresy, manifesting as propositional truth (Torrance, 1990:221; emphasis mine):

The Latin heresy, as I have called it, has to do with the strange dialectic in which knowledge of God is *abstracted from its objective ground* in his self-revelation, and is then *formalised in dogmatic propositions* which are identified with the truth as it is in God.

Torrance (1990:221) traces this manifestation of the Latin heresy back to Tertullian, who anticipated the Arian dualist mode of thought in the doctrine of revelation. Tertullian recast the God–Word relation as emanation rather than eternal generation. He recast the deposit of faith as (Torrance, 1990:222; emphasis mine):

... a set of *doctrinal propositions abstracted* from the substance of the faith or logically deduced from divine revelation and systematically connected together to form a prescriptive instrument in regulating belief and teaching in the Church.

Torrance (1990:222) traces this semi-detached notion of the Word–God relation on from Tertullian to Augustine. He argues that Augustine also maintained an epistemological dualism between two worlds – one accessible to sense and the other to intellect. Both dualisms he bequeathed to the mediaeval church via the theologies of Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas. Because these dualisms separated the revelation of God from his being, they naturally issued in the mediaeval hermeneutics of allegory and related techniques.

Mediaeval Latin theology was thus, on Torrance's reading, a blend of Augustinian dualism and Aristotelian abstraction, which functioned by extracting the ideal from the real (Torrance, 1990:223):

This gave rise to the view that thought and reality, sign and thing signified, were related, not through any direct act of cognition, but only in an external and indirect way through the intermedium of grace indwelling the Church.

Along with "the intermedium of grace", mediaeval Latin theology echoed Tertullian in method by treating the Scriptures as Aristotelian first principles from which to reason. Accordingly, the church itself was conceived of as bridging the epistemological and cosmological gap. The Reformers rejected this notion and replaced it with the mediating self-revelation of God in Christ. The Reformation recovered the consubstantial relation between God and his Word. It substituted the intermedium of grace for immediate contact with the Word of God, through the Scriptures and in the Spirit. The truth did not come by abstract logical systems but by miraculous union with Christ (Torrance, 1990:224).

Nevertheless, by Torrance's reckoning, the Latin heresy embedded in the Western doctrine of revelation survived the Reformation. Augustinian dualism was never fully exculpated. In the Protestant orthodox tradition, it resurfaced in dogmatic systems typified by the Westminster Confession of Faith (Torrance, 1990:225). It resurfaced in the pietist-liberal tradition, where the doctrine of revelation took a subjective turn, and where the Word of God came to be identified with an inner light indistinguishable from religious self-consciousness. For Torrance (1990:225), this position was embodied in the teachings of Friedrich Schleiermacher. In short, by the twentieth century there was scarcely a corner of the Western church in which the doctrine of revelation had not been deeply influenced by the Latin heresy.<sup>22</sup>

Barth responded with strident critique (Torrance, 1990:226–227). He reminded the Protestant orthodox church of the consubstantiality of the Son and the Spirit, which implies that the Bible mediates the dynamic ongoing self-communication of God himself and is not an independent and fixed corpus of propositional truth. He reminded the Protestant liberal church of the consubstantiality of the Son and the Father, which implies radical objectivity in which God is both Revealer and Revelation. Torrance (1990:227) suggests that underlying both errors is a failure to grasp the internal relation between revelation and reconciliation.

According to Torrance, both Barth and Athanasius devoted considerable attention to the soteriological implications of the divine oneness of being and agency. As mentioned, chief among these implications is the oneness of revelation and reconciliation. Torrance (1990:227; emphasis original) asks:

How could God actually reveal and give *himself* to us across the chasm, not only of our creaturely distance but of our sinful alienation from him, except through a movement of atoning reconciliation?

Barth (quoted in Torrance, 1990:227) puts it more emphatically: "Revelation is reconciliation as certainly as it is God himself: God with us, God beside us, and chiefly and decisively God for us". This is of course an implicit rejection of reconciliation on some external basis. As Athanasius made clear to the Arians, a moral or symbolic interpretation of the gospel is devoid of saving significance or the explanatory power to make anything meaningful of the human life of Christ. Barth had a similar argument with much of modern Western theology: it severed the ontological relation between the person of Christ and his saving work, thereby leaving that work to be understood in merely moral or juridical (and thus external) categories. Therefore Barth endeavoured to expound both revelation and reconciliation in terms of the internal Father–Son

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<sup>22</sup> McGrath (1999:178–179) notes some historical continuity between Torrance's doctrine of revelation and the Gallic and Belgic confessions, whereas Barth had great anxiety over the affirmation of natural theology found in those two confessions.

relation. His explanation included emphasis on the mutual relation between the incarnation and the atonement, the person and the work of Christ. For Barth, incarnation and atonement are simultaneous and span from the moment of his conception through to his ascension. Both are the product of the hypostatic union of the two natures, resulting in an incarnational atonement and an atoning incarnation, internal to the “incarnate constitution of the Mediator” (Torrance, 1990:230). Jesus Christ does not just mediate divine revelation or reconciliation – he *is* both.

Barth offered this radically integrated notion of divine being and agency in the saving economy, over and against Western soteriology. The difference between the two is paramount in their teaching on the cross. For Barth, the cross was the “culmination of God’s incarnational penetration into the alienated roots of humanity” (Torrance, 1990:231). In Western theology, the cross was an external, judicial transaction between God and sinners. Torrance accounts for this difference in terms of the Latin heresy.

A further outworking of the Latin heresy was in the Western church’s failure to fully apply the patristic maxim “the unassumed is the unhealed”. Torrance (1990:231) contends that “From Irenaeus to Cyril of Alexandria the Church had everywhere taught” that the Logos assumed our fallen, sinful human nature in order to save human nature. He assumed a sinful human nature while himself remaining sinless, in order to sanctify it and turn it back to the Father through perfect human obedience. Latin theology, in its Roman Catholic and Protestant guises, reversed this position and taught that the Logos assumed a human nature in its ideal original state – an obvious violation of the patristic maxim, according to Torrance (1990:232). The error originated with Leo the Great in his dualist approach to the person and work of Christ.<sup>23</sup> It was repeated by Abelard and Anselm, who conceived of atonement in external terms: the former moral, the latter juridical. Both dealt with actual rather than original sin and failed to treat the problem at its root in the ontology of humanity. Once again the Reformers (Torrance points to Calvin in particular) strove to correct this problem by reaffirming the identity of divine being and agency in Jesus Christ (Torrance, 1990:231). The identity of gift and Giver was communicated primarily through the doctrine of justification by faith, where faith was understood as entirely instrumental and powerless to “conciliate the grace of God” (Calvin quoted in Torrance, 1990:233).

Despite the countervailing efforts of the Reformers, the Latin heresy and its Aristotelian–Augustinian dualism persisted. Once again, the atonement was decoupled from the incarnation, resulting in a proliferation of ‘theories of atonement’ within Protestantism, focussing for the most

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<sup>23</sup> Farrow (2013) challenges this critique of Leo and the contention that the patristic maxim must imply that Jesus assumed a sinful human nature from Mary. He argues that what Jesus assumed and healed was not Mary’s sinful nature, “but her situation in ‘the land of sepulture’, her place under the Law, her place too under the shadow of Satan, beset by temptation, and her mortality”.

part on external relations (Torrance, 1990:233). It was in this milieu of disintegration that Barth offered his unifying theory of total substitution.

Barth's account of the incarnation stressed not only the *manward* movement of God, but also the *Godward* movement of man – both in the person of Jesus Christ. God came not only *for man*, but *as man*. The atoning incarnation constitutes both substitution and representation. Jesus Christ took our place (substitution) as one of us (representation). It was in part the latter, the vicarious *Godward* nature of Christ's humanity, that Barth offered as a corrective to the Latin heresy, which so coloured the theological convention of his day. It was his thoroughgoing contemplation of Jesus Christ's *homoousion* with both God and man that led him to that position, over and against alternative manifestations of the dualist Latin heresy (Torrance, 1990:234–235).

If the life and death of Christ was a conciliatory movement as a man on behalf of men, as Barth suggests, then this has profound implications for his (and so Torrance's) understanding of the Christian life. On this point, which is central to this study, I quote at length (Torrance, 1990:235; emphasis original):

Now if it was as man as well as God that Jesus Christ took our place, he must be recognised as acting in our place in *all* the basic acts of man's response to God: in faith and repentance, in obedience and prayer, in receiving God's blessing and in thanksgiving for it.

This is the heart of what Torrance assimilates into his own description of the Christian life as *participation*. As articulated by Barth, it was offensive teaching to much of the theological world (Torrance, 1990:235; emphasis original):

It is at this very point, however, that both liberal and evangelical theologians object, for they feel that the inner citadel of human freedom is being threatened. God may have done everything else for us, but there is something he does not and cannot do for us, in the personal decision of faith and repentance which each person must make for himself or herself. Thus they will have nothing to do with the concept of *total substitution* in what Jesus Christ does for us and our salvation.

The next step for Torrance (1990:235–236; emphasis original) was to argue that the root of this opposition was the Latin heresy, and at the bottom of the heresy stood devotion to autonomous reason:

This objection to the teaching of Karl Barth is very evident in the criticism of his insistence that salvation is all of grace from beginning to end. But to accuse Barth of saying that since in grace God is everything, therefore man is nothing, betrays that both Liberals and Evangelicals can only juxtapose God and man, divine grace and human freedom in a *logical* way, in which all of God logically excludes any of man. It is just here that one discerns how deeply the Latin heresy in

construing the Gospel in dualist and abstractive terms is embedded even in evangelical theology. Behind it there is evidently a rejection of the principle that the unassumed is the unhealed and in particular a rejection of the truth that it is our alienated mind that the Son of God assumed in the incarnation in order to heal it from its deep-seated distortion through being turned in upon itself. The Latin heresy operates with a form of the autonomous reason which has not been allowed to come under the judgement of the Cross, in which Christ wholly took our place, substituting himself for us in mind as well as in body. In refusing to agree that our minds need to be redeemed, liberal and evangelical thinkers evidently allow an unreconciled and unregenerated human reason to become lodged in the heart of their theologies. It is an unbaptised rationalism of this kind that so often characterises fundamentalist theology...

Torrance (1990:236–240) dispatches the charge of universalism so often laid against Barth in the same manner: it is a product of the Latin heresy, with its tendency towards dualism and logico-causalism; its Augustinian-Thomist, Protestant scholastic and Newtonian heritage; and its deterministic paradigm. He concludes his chapter with a summary of the integrative theology of Karl Barth, which he argued throughout was the great antidote to the Latin heresy (Torrance, 1990:336).

The indivisible oneness of being and agency and the Latin heresy are indispensable elements in Torrance's understanding of Barth's theology, and our understanding of Torrance. As we shall see, they are particularly indispensable to our understanding of Torrance's conception of the Christian response, Christian agency, and the Christian life in toto, as a profound participation in Christ, and therefore *all of grace*.

#### **2.2.1.4 The methodological influence of Michael Polanyi**

Torrance's epistemology everywhere exhibits the marks of influence by Michael Polanyi. Whether it is in the approbation of Polanyi's influence or in the adoption of his taxonomy, Torrance openly demonstrates the effect of the British-Hungarian philosopher on his own thinking. The impact of Polanyi on the field of epistemology at large is described by Torrance himself in an essay titled "The Framework of Belief". There is much we can deduce about the personal influence of Polanyi on Torrance from this essay.

Torrance (1980a:1) approaches the topic of Polanyi's impact by tracing the origin and development of the Enlightenment dichotomies between faith and sight, and faith and reason, and then by contrasting these to the biblical relation of the two. The juxtaposition of faith and sight has its origin in the Greek philosophical habit of elevating sight above the other senses. Torrance notes that, by contrast, the Old Testament Hebrews stressed hearing of the word, and thus privileged faith over sight. This position was rooted in an understanding of the *invisible* God as

ultimate reality, and therefore of trust, rather than sight, as the appropriate mode of relation with ultimate reality.

Torrance (1980a:2) points out that the New Testament is no different in its conviction. Jesus commended those who walked by faith rather than sight, and exhorted others to do the same. Paul reiterates the teaching of Jesus by characterising faith as a hearing “response to the faithfulness of God himself” (Torrance, 1980a:2). It is a human response evoked by the self-evidencing reality of God, revealed in his Word, which supersedes sight. And because faith “reposes not on the weakness of the believer but on the power and constancy of its divine object”, it is itself the ground of all rational knowledge. The biblical contrast between faith and sight does not map onto a similar contrast between faith and reason. Whereas faith supersedes sight, faith undergirds reason. Once again, this is because the object of faith is the divine source of all that is rational in the universe.

The objective rather than subjective locus of faith is underscored in the letter to the Hebrews (Torrance, 1980a:3). A similar understanding was taken up by Clement of Alexandria, who defined faith as “the connection between human thought and reality” (Torrance, 1980a:4). Thus the most basic proof available is for inquirers to subject themselves to the “compelling self-evidence of reality” (Torrance, 1980a:4). Logic is merely a clarification and extension of that encounter. Theology, therefore, must involve profound submission to the nature of the object of its inquiry. Augustine adopted a similar position. He constantly stressed the primacy of faith to reason and their reciprocal relation (Torrance, 1980a:4–5).

While Torrance (1980a:5) recognises merit in the Clementine–Augustinian teaching, he also points to a serious fault line: an underlying dualism between the intelligible and sensible worlds. Torrance (1980b:136) defines dualism, in terms of Polanyi’s thinking, as “the division of reality into two incompatible spheres of being”. That is precisely how he uses the term in this short history: to describe a cosmological dualism that entered into the theology of Clement, Augustine and their adherents.<sup>24</sup> This cosmological dualism was a Neoplatonic accretion, and the result was a split in faith and knowledge so that intelligent or spiritual knowledge was of another world and sensory data from this world was interpreted as symbolic of that other world. In the Middle Ages there was an attempt at reintegration by applying the Aristotelian principle that all intelligible knowledge is first passed through the senses – ideas are abstracted from sense experience. Note

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<sup>24</sup> Torrance (1980b:136) cites epistemological and anthropological dualism as other possible manifestations of dualism. Unless otherwise stated, all the definitions in this section are taken from the “notes on terms and concepts” appended to this volume on Polanyi’s influence on Christianity, of which Torrance is the editor.

the role of dualism in Torrance's (1980b:133; emphasis added) definition of abstraction. Abstraction, with special reference to the contribution of Michael Polanyi, is:

a mode of thought in which the observable surface of something is considered apart from the concrete base in reality to which it is naturally joined, or in which certain aspects of reality are subjected to attention to the neglect of all others. Traditionally the purpose of abstraction is to separate the essential features exhibited by a set of particular things in order to reach a general conception of them as a class, or to detach the formal aspects of things from their material embodiment so that they can be more easily and consistently connected together in a formal system. Abstraction thus imposes on thought a *dualism* between form and matter or structure and being which gives rise to a formalistic and artificial picture of things.

Thus the medieval attempt at reintegration involved abstraction, which in the end served only to deepen the underlying dualism present in theology, especially between natural and supernatural knowledge. The medieval synthesis posited that only sensory knowledge had an evidential basis and consequently faith had no evidential basis in objective reality. While reason was assent to evidence, faith was assent to authority (Torrance, 1980a:6).

The dualism embedded in the Aristotelian-Augustinian framework manifested first in an orientation towards material and efficient causes as the proper object of study, rather than towards the final cause, which was in God. This was associated with a stress on sensory data. Taken to its extreme in the physical sciences by Galileo and Newton, and formalised by Locke, the result was a narrow logical positivism and philosophical materialism that excluded extra-sensory knowledge a priori. Positivism is defined as (Torrance, 1980b:142):

... the view which denies that we can know more than tangible external facts... [and] seeks to purify science from metaphysics by avoiding any ontological reference of knowledge to reality and aims at the achievement of strict detachment and impersonality by discarding all unprovable beliefs as arbitrary personal manifestations.

Polanyi labelled this view the "massive modern absurdity" (Torrance, 1980a:7). It polarised faith and reason and relegated the former to private opinion or radical subjectivity.

According to Torrance (1980a:8), it was Einstein who upset the modern positivist epistemological equilibrium. He rejected the abstraction of knowledge from objective reality implicit in either extreme of empiricism or rationalism. He insisted instead on an inseparable intertwining of the sensory and the ideal in the knowledge process. He did not allow for a logical connection between the empirical and the theoretical, between experience and ideas. Instead of logic, Einstein posited an intuitive connection based on sympathy with the objective reality under scrutiny. This takes place within a framework built on the underlying conviction of "intelligibility and reliability" in the

fabric of reality. It was this acknowledgement of conviction, intuition, and even faith as indispensable in the scientific process, as well as its “ontological foundations in objective reality”, that resonated with Polanyi. Torrance (1980b:144):

... Polanyi defines reality in respect of the unlimited capacity of things for revealing themselves to our inquiries in yet unthought of, or quite unexpected, ways in the future, thus manifesting a domain of independent being with inherent significance or rationality that is not exhausted by our conceptions of it and does not depend on our knowing for its truth and existence.

In the thinking of Polanyi, reality per definition gives knowledge an objective rather than a subjective orientation. The direction of influence and impression runs from object to subject, from reality to inquirer, and not the reverse. Indeed, it is the determinative force of objective reality that necessitates faith in the knowledge process (Torrance, 1980a:9–10):

No human intelligence, Polanyi claimed, however critical or original, can operate outside such a context of faith, for it is within that context that there arises within us, under compulsion from the reality of the world we experience, an operative set of convictions or a framework of beliefs which prompts and guides our inquiries and controls our interpretation of data.

Einstein ascribed extra-logical status to this “operative set of convictions” because they do not relate idea to idea, but idea to being. Faith, then, is the “mode of rationality adopted by the reason in its fidelity to what it seeks to understand” (Torrance, 1980a:10). Torrance (1980a:10) likens the position of Einstein and Polanyi to that of the early church fathers who believed in order to understand, and in furthering their understanding strengthened their belief. Indeed, his description of the epistemology of the church fathers (Torrance, 1988a:17–45) is remarkably similar, even in word choice, to his description of Polanyi’s epistemology. For Torrance, Polanyi echoes the Judeo-Christian concept of the relation of faith to reason and experience. Faith “sees” by the powers of the seen reality. Faith correlates with the intrinsic rationality of the objective reality in its focus. That is where faith differs from perception: the former is anchored in the object, the latter in the subject. Moreover, the reality of the object of faith determines the mode of response. This is especially the case where God is the reality in question (Torrance, 1980a:11).

Torrance takes Polanyi’s basic conclusion that “all knowledge rests upon faith” and its premises, and applies them to the role of faith in Christian epistemology. The first premise he unpacks and applies is that *belief is objectively, not subjectively grounded*. In any act of knowing, there is a subjective and an objective pole. The act can only be considered rational if the subject is oriented towards the object and does not confuse the object for himself. Polanyi asserts that belief arises “as a kind of listening obedience of the mind to reality” (subject to object), which is prior to reason (Torrance, 1980a:11). Fundamental belief or faith is a response to an inherent intelligibility in

reality, and therefore it is anchored in the objective pole of the knowledge relationship. And again, the reality determines the mode of response, or the nature of the faith. Where the reality is personal, faith will take the form of trust. All this, Torrance (1980a:13) avers, is precisely what we find in the New Testament, where faith is a listening obedience and trust is “evoked and sustained” by the Word of God.

The second premise is that *belief is a basic conviction that arises in our minds compulsorily but not necessarily*. Belief is not a product of choice or hypothesis, for both are subjectively anchored. Belief is, by the standards of rationality and good conscience, the irresistible force of objective reality on our minds. It is an obligation to submit to the truth imposed by the truth itself. That said, Polanyi will not allow for belief to be considered logically necessary, since that would discount the possibility of error and, importantly for our purposes, it would destroy the responsible agency of the believer (Torrance, 1980a:14):

Thus while belief pivots upon the objective pole of the knowing relation, the subjective pole must be given its proper if subordinate place, i.e. the role of the person or rational agent in believing, and believing as he feels he ought to believe in fidelity to the truth. As Polanyi expresses it: “The freedom of the subjective person to do as he pleases is overruled by the freedom of the responsible person to act as he must”.<sup>25</sup>

Polanyi captures this combination of personal decision under compulsion in the term “commitment”. Torrance (1980b:134) defines commitment in the thought of Polanyi as “the personal responsible submission of the mind to the requirements of a reality independent of it” and emphasises its objective orientation. He then draws what he sees as obvious parallels between Polanyi’s analysis and the Christian structure of belief (Torrance, 1980a:15–16):

If it is true in natural science, it is certainly true in Christianity that belief arises in us compulsorily yet freely under the constraint of the creative reality and self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. “Every belief is both a free gift and the payment of a tribute exacted from us. It is given on the personal responsibility of the believer, yet in the clear assumption that he cannot do otherwise.” That is precisely how St. Paul understood Christian faith, but the words I have cited from Polanyi describe scientific belief. Because the grace of God comes to us unconditionally but brings with it unconditional obligations, faith that is grounded on grace carries with it a deep sense of both freedom and compulsion. We believe freely but believe as we must. Faith is a free responsible act of our own but it is anchored beyond itself in the faithfulness of God which undergirds and sustains it so that it acquires by the grace of God a strength beyond anything we can give it. Therefore in faith it is not on our own believing that we rely but on him in whom we believe, upon the grasp of

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<sup>25</sup> This resonates strongly with Torrance’s account of Bonhoeffer’s notion of ethical responsibility (see “Cheap and costly grace”, 2.2.2.3 below).

God's love which will not let us go. Epistemologically expressed: the objective pole of Christian belief is truth, truth over which we have no control, but truth that apprehends us and makes us free.

The final premise is that *the formation and function of beliefs takes place within a developing framework of belief and tradition*. The deepening interaction between belief and understanding forms the context for the formation of normative beliefs. These in turn provide a framework for further knowing, which constitutes the "fiduciary programme", or a "self-expanding system of belief" (Torrance, 1980a:17). Moreover, the fiduciary programme is correlated objectively with reality and subjectively with the community in which it is embedded. That community is united by a common belief in the intelligibility of reality. This is the one constant belief that allows for variability throughout the fiduciary programme. It is the source of true belief. It allows for all other belief to be tested, reformulated and passed from generation to generation as evolving tradition. In other words, the intelligibility of objective reality lies at the heart of the fiduciary programme, and thus at the heart of Polanyi's epistemology.

Polanyi employs the concepts of indwelling and participation to stress the importance of community learning in a dynamic tradition of belief and understanding (Torrance, 1980a:23). Of course, these concepts are central to Torrance's understanding of the Christian response and the Christian life, and therefore central to this study. Torrance (1980b:139) defines the concept of indwelling in Polanyi's thought as:

the activity of knowing whereby the mind dwells in a coherence or integration latent in some object (or teaching or person) in order to interiorise it until there is a structural kinship between the knowing subject and the object known... Theologically regarded, indwelling is an act of meditation and worship in and through which we are given access to God in his own inner communion.

Interestingly, 'interiorisation towards structural kinship' might well be considered a fitting definition for imitation.

In sum, there are a number of themes and concepts in Polanyi's epistemology that are appropriated by Torrance and built into the architecture of his theology and are relevant to this study because of their bearing on how he understands the Christian response to God. Abstraction, objective reality, compulsion, commitment, participation, indwelling, and the rejection of dualism – all are words and concepts widely deployed in the writings of Torrance, especially in reference to the Christian response.

## 2.2.2 Torrance: epistemology, Christology, soteriology and ethics<sup>26</sup>

### 2.2.2.1 The Mediation of Christ (1992)

We can see the influence of the Greek fathers, Athanasius, Barth and Polanyi very clearly in *The Mediation of Christ*. Torrance (1992a:1) begins by describing, with echoes of his reading of Barth and Polanyi, the dualism that emerged from classical Greece and the “European tradition of analytical thought”. It is a bifurcated mode of thought which abstracted the sensible from the intelligible “with disastrous consequences”. For Torrance (1992a:1; emphasis added), this type of dichotomous thinking had profound effects in theology, where it resulted in the detachment of “Christ from God... Christ from Israel, and... *Christianity from Christ himself*”. Thus we see from the outset that in the thinking of Torrance the effects of dualism are thoroughgoing – they ripple through the theological system and emerge in the relation between Christians and Christ (the particular focus of this study).

For Torrance, the remedy to such thinking, which he would ascribe to Athanasius and Polanyi, is to investigate all things as they exist in their immediate nexus of relations. Torrance (1992a:47) describes the problem with the analytic tradition in terms of dualistic abstractive thinking, and the appropriate solution, as such:

... the proper approach would be one in which we consider things in terms of the actual relations in which they are found, relations which have to do with what they really are. These are being-constituting relations or ‘onto-relations’, as I call them. This leads to a form of inquiry in which we probe into their internal relations in order to allow them to disclose to us their inherent organisation or structure so that we can understand them in the light of their intrinsic significance or logos which controls our interpretation and description of them.

For Torrance (e.g., 1992a:50, 53–54), the incarnation is both the warrant for this method of inquiry and the heart of its discovery. He believed, in concert with Athanasius and the church fathers, in

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<sup>26</sup> As stated above, the goal in this chapter is descriptive. Critical analysis is largely left for later chapters. The three works summarised here are offered as a representative sample of Torrance’s writings on the relevant issues. They are not presented in chronological order of publication. They are instead presented in a loose logical order broadly reflecting Torrance’s theological method from epistemology in and through Christology to soteriology and finally the Christian response. Although each of the works touches one or more of these categories, I present them in order of emphasis. In each case, I attempt to pull the strands of epistemology, Christology and soteriology together into a presentation of Torrance’s concept of the Christian response. I see nothing in the development of Torrance’s thought over time that warrants preferring a chronological layout. There is sufficient coherence across his early and later writings to allow for organising the material in a logical rather than chronological order, and in my view a logical order better serves the purposes of this study.

considering method and content inseparable, and in centring both in the incarnation (Torrance, 1992a:4–5; emphasis added):

Looking back we can say that the Apostles and Fathers came upon a basic insight in the light of which the whole saving Event of Jesus Christ came to be understood out of its intrinsic intelligibility and within the framework of objective meaning which it created for itself in the context of Israel. *The fundamental clue with which they operated was the oneness of Jesus Christ...* with God the Father on the one hand and with the unique fact and history of Israel... on the other hand. Within that complex of interrelations they found themselves coming to grips with *the essential message of the Gospel embodied in Jesus Christ...*

Thus the incarnate Christ is both the method and the message. In his incarnate person, he mediates both revelation and reconciliation, with revolutionary implications for Christian morality (Torrance, 1992a:71; emphasis added):

Indeed, it was precisely into the midst of that depraved and dehumanised humanity that the son of God penetrated by his incarnation in Jesus Christ, that is, into the very split in our human nature where we are not and cannot be what we ought to be, and where we manipulate moral righteousness in the protection of our selfish ends. Through hypostatic union and atoning union inter-penetrating each other he laid hold of both sides of that split and brought them together in his own Person, removing the sin and guilt which perpetuated the split, reconciling man to God and God to man in such a way that *he set the whole moral order upon a new basis. That is the moral order he embodied in himself* as the one man who was and is the man he ought to be, without any trace of insincerity or hypocrisy... Thus through hypostatic and atoning union fulfilled within his own incarnate Person as the one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ became the humanising Man who constitutes among us the creative source for the humanising of mankind.

Through the atoning incarnation, Jesus Christ constitutes in himself the new humanity as the basis for a the new and distinctively *Christian* moral order, available to us by participation. On the contrary, imitation of a certain type belongs to the old moral order (Torrance, 1992a:70; emphasis added):

The human heart is so desperately wicked that it cunningly takes advantage of the hiatus between what we are and what we ought to be in order to latch on to the *patterns and structures of moral behaviour* required of us, so that under the image of what is good and right it masks or even fortifies its evil intentions. Such is the self-deception of our human heart and the depravity of our self-will

that we seek to justify ourselves before God and our neighbours by a *formal, impersonal fulfilment* of the divine law in which *we remain untouched in ourselves and uncommitted in Persons*.<sup>27</sup>

Latching on to “patterns and structures of moral behaviour” in a “formal”, “impersonal” fulfilment of law is the language of a certain kind of imitation which for Torrance belongs to the old moral order and is as such to be left behind for participation in Christ.

In a chapter entitled “The Mediation of Christ in our human response”, Torrance (1992a:78; emphasis added) argues that the entire basis of our response to God is the Godward ministry of Jesus Christ:

... in Jesus there was provided for mankind a way of response to God which issued out of the depths of its existence and as its very own and in which each human being was free to share through communion with Jesus. Thus *in Jesus the final response of man toward God was taken up...* as the covenanted way of vicarious response to God which avails for all of us and in which we all may share through the Spirit of Jesus Christ which he freely gives us.

Torrance (1992a:81–94) goes on to relate the mediating agency of Christ to “what we do” in the areas of faith, conversion, worship, the sacraments and evangelism.

Faith, for Torrance, is our participation in the reciprocal relation of God’s faithfulness, on the one hand, to the faithful human response of Christ on the other.<sup>28</sup> Christ actualises the faithfulness of God and restores the faithfulness of humanity. Thus at every point it is the faithfulness of God (Father and Son) that establishes and upholds our faith. And therefore, “if we think of belief, trust or faith as a human activity before God, we must think of Jesus Christ as believing, trusting and having faith in God the Father on our behalf, and in our place” (Torrance, 1992a:82–83). Torrance admits that this position will create problems for those steeped in the Western reverence for individual freedom.

Likewise with conversion. Our conversion is a sharing in the rebirth of humanity in Jesus Christ. Therefore even the personal decision of repentance is not taken independently but is Christ’s decision for God made on our behalf. So also in worship. Our worship is a participation through the Spirit in Christ’s self-offering to the Father. Torrance (1992a:90) says of the sacraments, “Granted that they are our responses..., they are nevertheless not sacraments of what we do but of what Jesus Christ has done in our place and on our behalf.” In this case he appears to allow for a human agency, but only insofar as it signifies and serves the agency of Christ. The same

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<sup>27</sup> Note the use of the word “committed”, which Torrance most likely invests with the sense Polanyi gives it, i.e., personal and responsible submission to an objective reality.

<sup>28</sup> Again, note the echoes of Polanyi here.

applies to evangelism, where Torrance (1992a:94; emphasis added) calls sinners to repent and believe in Jesus Christ, but only on this basis:

*He has acted in your place in the whole range of your human life and activity, including your personal decisions, and your responses to God's love, and even your acts of faith.* He has believed for you, fulfilled your human response to God, even made your personal decision for you, so that he acknowledges you before God as one who has already responded to God in him, who has already believed in God through him, and whose personal decision is already implicated in Christ's self-offering to the Father, in all of which he has been fully and completely accepted by the Father, so that in Jesus Christ you are already accepted by him. Therefore, renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

The strong emphasis on the agency of Christ is striking, whereas the agency of the Christian has undoubtedly receded, perhaps into obscurity.

Torrance (1992a:95) argues that the pattern of the human response was established in Mary, the mother of Jesus, and her response to the conception of Christ.<sup>29</sup> There was no synergy in the conception and birth of Christ. These were entirely the gracious acts of God the Spirit. And yet, he did not override Mary's personhood in the process, but rather "blessed, sanctified and upheld" it within the reciprocal relation of God to Israel (Torrance, 1992a:95).<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Jesus himself, "in his humanity, stands for the fact that all of grace does not mean nothing of man". Thus the Christian response constitutes a sharing in the Son's relation with the Father in the power of the Spirit (Torrance, 1992a:117). While it is participation from start to finish, this participation is not, according to Torrance, in a zero-sum trade-off with the agency of the Christian. To use his language, *all of grace implies all of man*.

In *The Mediation of Christ* we discover that in method Torrance is a critical realist like Polanyi; in theology, he stresses the objective reality and subjective freedom of God, as does Barth; and in cosmology, soteriology and the Christian response, he defines the relation as one of unconditional grace and radical contingency or participation, as the Greek fathers, including Athanasius, do.

#### **2.2.2.2 Royal Priesthood (1955)**

*Royal Priesthood* is a collection of essays on the topic of priesthood – the priesthood of Christ, the priesthood of the church, and the relation between the two. Torrance's focus on the relation

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<sup>29</sup> Mary seems a strange choice in light of the stress he lays on Christ as our human response. Why would Christ himself not be the pattern? And if he were, would that not amount to imitation?

<sup>30</sup> Here we encounter echoes of the language of Reformed doctrine of providence that may prove helpful later.

between the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the church lends insight into his understanding of the Christian response to the person and work of Christ.

Torrance (1955:1) opens chapter 1 of *Royal Priesthood* by considering the relation between the Word of God and the priestly office. The Old Testament noun for priest כֹּהֵן carries connotations of speaking truth, God's truth in particular. Thus the primary function of the priesthood was to mediate God's Word to man. A secondary function was to mediate the response of man to God, in a liturgy of oblation and sacrifice.

The Old Testament priesthood existed within the context of covenant – the saving relation in which the Word of God constituted Israel a kingdom of priests “because, as St Paul put it, ‘unto them were committed the oracles of God’ (Rom. 3.2)” (Torrance, 1955:2). In the covenant, God appointed and governed the cultic response to his Word. That response had no efficacy in and of itself; it merely witnessed to the person and saving action of God. It was a sign that pointed beyond itself to the revelation of God in his Word. It in no way acted upon God; it took the form of response to God. In the covenant relation, man was subject only “in the secondary sense of liturgical obedience” (Torrance, 1955:3). Here we see the early hints in Torrance's understanding of an entirely derivative human response.

The two functions of the Old Testament priesthood are embodied by Moses and Aaron. Moses is the mediator the Word of God to the people, par excellence. Aaron offers witness to that Word in a liturgical response that extended into the unfolding history of Israel. Almost immediately in that history, the God-ordained order of the priesthood came under attack from within, and the relation of Word to response was inverted. Torrance offers the golden calf incident as exemplary of a pattern that became entrenched in the life of Israel. Before Moses had a chance to mediate the Word of God to the people, Israel had fashioned a response for themselves. In this, and other incidents like it (Torrance, 1955:5):

... we have combined the attempt to transform the Israelite cult into something more pleasurable and to make the sacrificial priesthood stand by itself, independently of the mediation of the Word. That is the story of Israel all through the centuries.

In this manner the priestly function was perverted into an idolatrous attempt to act upon God rather than respond to his living Word. By that same Word, God spoke through the prophets against such a declaration of independence. The prophets condemned independent liturgy and empty sacrifice in the strongest possible terms. They called Israel back to a heartfelt response to the Word of God. They reaffirmed God's covenant promises to destroy the temple, which had become a monument to false security. This line of prophecy reached its zenith in the doctrine of the Suffering Servant. “As a lamb led to the slaughter” (Torrance, 1955:6), the Servant embodied

both parties to the covenant and both aspects of the priesthood. The Servant embodied both the redeeming Word of God and sacrificial obedience on behalf of Israel.

Nevertheless, Israel persisted in apostasy and idolatry, and the Word of God banished them into exile. After exile, Israel attempted to domesticate that same Word in the era of scribes and in the form of 'Instruction'. Once again, a self-sufficient, independent law and liturgy attempted to buffer Israel from direct contact with the prophetic Word of God. It is into this ossified and perverted priesthood that Jesus Christ the High Priest arrives. As Torrance (1955:7) describes it:

Here where the Word of the living God is made flesh, the two aspects of priesthood are combined and fulfilled. Jesus Christ combined in Himself both God's saving action toward man, and man's perfect obedience toward God. He is Himself... the complete form of the divine action, the Word made flesh, and the perfect form of the human response in obedience to the Father.

As such, he is the perfect fulfilment of the Suffering Servant prophecy and its dual priestly functions in the "mediation of God's Word, and liturgical witness to it" (Torrance, 1955:9).

Torrance goes on to explore the priestly ministry of Christ (from Hebrews), the priestly ministry of the church (from the writings of Paul), and the relation between the two. He asserts that in the book of Hebrews, the work of Christ as high priest is described as "confession" (*ὁμολογία*). He then offers this strong statement of human response as participation (Torrance, 1955:13; emphasis added):

Because that is Christ's confession, it is also our confession. We may now take His confession as our own, His answer of prayer on our lips, and in His Name go boldly before the throne of grace. That confession is the one thing we hold on to. It is the confession of our hope, for all our hope rests on the obedience of Christ on the Cross and His confession before the Father. The confession of the Church which answers to the confession of the High Priest is the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God continually. The reconciliation wrought by Christ has been completed once and for all and by its very nature cannot be repeated, but it is given a *counterpart* in the Church in the form of Eucharistic prayer and praise.

At most, the human response to the Word of God is "counterpart", and that itself is a gift. Torrance (1955:14; emphasis added) follows this with another strong statement of response as participation in Christ:

Both parts of priesthood are fulfilled *for us*. The act of God in Christ for us, and the act of man in Christ for us, are inseparable, in an atonement of substitutionary nature. It is not only that as Son of God, or Apostle from God, Christ has done for us what we could not do, but that as High Priest

in our humanity He has done for us what we could not do. He has once and for all offered to God *our obedience, our response, our witness, our amen*. He became our brother man and He offered on our behalf a human obedience, a human response, a human witness and a human amen, so that *in Him our human answer to God in life, worship, and prayer is already completed*. He is in the fullest sense our *ὁμολογία*. It can only be ours, therefore, if it involves the *setting aside* (*ἀθέτησις*) of the obedience, response, witness, amen and even the worship and prayer which we offer on our own... [T]hese are *displaced* by His completed Self-offering. We can only offer what has already been offered on our behalf, and offer it by the only mode appropriate to such a substitutionary offering, by prayer, thanksgiving and praise.

The language of completion, displacement and “setting aside” speaks to an absolute participation in the agency of Christ and the total voiding of independent Christian agency.

Torrance (1955:15–20) garners further support for the notion of our response as participation in the perfect human response of Christ as he considers the New Testament use of Old Testament language of the cult. The chief distinction is that in the New Testament the semantic domain of this sacrificial language is applied not to religious rites, but to the ministry of the church in relation to the heavenly ministry of Christ (Torrance, 1955:16). It is a “liturgy of life and love [for one another] in the Gospel as the embodied liturgy of thanksgiving to God” (Torrance, 1955:17). The ministry of the church is a thank-offering, since Christ rendered all other sacrifice unnecessary (Torrance, 1955:18).

It is Torrance’s probe into the relation between the ministry of the church on earth and the ongoing ministry of Christ in heaven that is particularly apposite to this study. He follows Hebrews 8:5 and 9:23 in defining that relation as one of *ὑπόδειγμα*: “a shadowy representation put forward in carnal commandments signifying a higher reality” (Torrance, 1955:20). Now that Christ is ascended, how is the Christian life and ministry a *ὑπόδειγμα* of his heavenly life and ministry? It is here that Torrance rejects out of hand what he calls the “Platonic doctrine of imitation (*μίμησις*)”. In this doctrine, the relation goes beyond signification and becomes one of transcription. But Torrance points out that this is precisely what the writer to the Hebrews tries to avoid by selecting *ὑπόδειγμα* over *παράδειγμα* or *εἶδος*, the terms used in the Septuagint to translate *תְּבִנִית* (“pattern”). *Παράδειγμα* and *εἶδος* were philosophically loaded terms that conveyed the Platonic concept of “eternal forms or the exemplars of eternal forms” (Torrance, 1955:20). On the contrary, rather than exemplar or transcription, *ὑπόδειγμα* functions as a pointer or sign to the heavenly reality. It points away from itself to the objective reality of the thing signified; it is not a transcription of that reality, fitted for space and time, with efficacy in and of itself.

Torrance (1955:21) notes that ὑπόδειγμα is also used in John 13:13f where Jesus washes his disciples' feet and calls them to follow his example (ὑπόδειγμα) in service. He (Torrance, 1955:21) concludes that "the pattern for the Church's worship and its relation to the heavenly worship is to be discerned in the Suffering Servant". Elsewhere, Torrance (1955:85) takes pains to cast this passage in terms of participation in the servant-ministry of Christ rather than imitation of it, even though the language ("For I have given you an *example*, that you also should do just as I have done to you"; John 13:15, ESV) clearly suggests imitation. He argues that, while the patterning required by ὑπόδειγμα does imply derivation, it also implies categorical distinction between the service of the servant and that of the Master. The servant can participate in but cannot replicate the service of the Master.

In another essay, Torrance (1955:92–94) describes in greater detail the problem that emerged when the Platonic doctrine of imitation was "applied to Christian life and thought".<sup>31</sup> True Christian response is essentially "signitive" (Torrance, 1955:93). It should "pass on a meaning not embodied in [its] forms". It is (Torrance, 1955:93):

... [a] mode of signification in which the earthly sign in some measure corresponds with the heavenly reality, but in comparison with which the signs are nothing in themselves, for they carry us altogether beyond themselves and convey what can never be reduced to our earthly forms.

For Torrance (1955:93–94), the problem with Platonic μίμησις is that it leads beyond a "signitive" relation to a much more reciprocal even hypostatic relation. It implies "a hypostatic transcription or μίμησις of the heavenly reality, claiming veneration on earth" (Torrance, 1955:93). Moreover, the Platonic conception of the temporal as an image of the eternal imported in μίμησις has profound and far-reaching implications for Christian theology at large. It decouples the importance of the Christ-event from its anchor in history. As such, it promotes docetism in doctrine, demythologising in exegetical method, and practical applications, such as transubstantiation in the Mass.

The remedy to all this, according to Torrance (1955:94), is a rejection of Platonic imitation in favour of the early church and Reformation doctrine of participation in Christ. In his own words (Torrance, 1955:94):

The Church as the Body of Christ participates in Christ's Prophetic, Priestly, and Kingly ministry by serving Him. The Church's ministry may be described as a corporate priesthood of the Many reposing substitutionarily in the One Priest, the One Mediator between God and man, the Man

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<sup>31</sup> He does so with particular reference to church government and Christian art, but the arguments extend to the Christian response *in toto*.

Christ Jesus. The pattern of this relation between the priesthood of the Church and the Priesthood of Christ is to be described in terms of *hypodeigma*: a pattern put forward in the Church for observation, signifying a higher reality.

In short, we participate in Christ's service by serving him, and by serving him we do not imitate his service in the Platonic sense; we merely signify the higher reality of his service.

Thus, in his biblical theology of the priesthood – that of Christ, that of the church, and that of the relation between the two – and in his encounter with Platonic thinking in the church, Torrance rules in favour of participation and against Platonic imitation as the essential structure of the Christian response. Torrance (1955:22) concludes that:

... the Church is given to participate in His ministry, in word, deed, and life; in word, by proclaiming the Gospel to the nations, by prayer and worship and praise and thanksgiving; in life and deed, by self-sacrifice, by ministering humbly to the needs of others, and by presenting our bodies in worship to God. In this unity of word and deed, of worship and mission, in the life of the Church as the Israel of God under the rubric of the Suffering Servant, we have the fulfilment of what the cult-prophets of the Old Testament saw from afar.

In the subsequent essays in *Royal Priesthood* on the function of the church, era of the church, priesthood of the church and the episcopate, Torrance reiterates his advocacy of participation as the foundation of the Christian life, along with his rejection of imitation. He does, however, use a wide range of language that is synonymous and analogous to imitation in describing the Christian life in relation to God. He is also painstaking in his avoidance of that particular word. A number of examples demonstrate the nuances of Torrance's position.

In his discussion of the existence and mission of the church in relation to the Christ event, Torrance (1955:25, 32) applauds Barth's qualification and subsequent rejection of the word "repetition" in favour of "reflection" and "analogy". Barth (quoted in Torrance, 1955:32) qualifies "repetition" as such:

The repetition is quite heterogeneous. Yet for all its heterogeneity, it is homogenous too, although the uniqueness of the objective Revelation forbids us to call it a continuation, prolongation, or extension or the like.

Indeed, it was Bultmann's use of "repetition" to stress the existential subjectivity of faith, along with the Roman Catholic idea of repetition in the Mass, that moved Barth to drop the word in later volumes of *Church Dogmatics* (Torrance, 1955:25).

Barth (quoted in Torrance, 1955:32n1) also insisted that the idea of repetition of an aspect of the Christ-event in the historical existence of the church excludes any possibility of autonomy: “The Church lives with Christ as the Body with its Head”.

What Barth said (and Torrance approved) of repetition could easily be said and was said by Torrance of imitation, as outlined above. Our imitation of Christ is heterogeneous with him in his objective reality, but never autonomous. It is homogenous, but never continuous.

Besides those already listed, Torrance (1955) uses a number of words, phrases and concepts to express the relation of the life and ministry of the church to that of Christ. These include: analogy (pp. 29, 84); expression and demonstration (p. 31); correlation (pp. 35, 37); reflex (p. 39); representation (p. 41); counterpoint (p. 61); following and discipleship (p. 85); fellowship (p. 86); echo (pp. 95–96); pointing, antepast and anticipation (p. 96); “indirect relation” in contrast to the “direct relation” of participation via the Holy Spirit (p. 97). Though the exact term “imitation” is never used, and, so it seems, is deliberately avoided, it has to be conceded that these words, phrases and concepts convey a similar meaning.

In addition to these, Torrance (1955:53–56) uses “στοιχεῖν”. Torrance (1955:53) defines *στοιχεῖν* as “[going] in a row in accordance with some principle of order” or, to schematise. *Στοιχεῖν* entails conformity to Christ as Suffering Servant by participation, but also the rejection of the worldly order as a schematising principle (Torrance, 1955:54–56). Love is the ordering principle (as embodied by the Suffering Servant), and it “manifests itself in the church in the form of self-denial, suffering and service” (Torrance, 1955:66–67). We might well ask, ‘What is imitation of Christ if not the implicit obverse of self-denial?’ Despite taking great care to avoid the language of imitation and to stress participation instead, in his use of *στοιχεῖν*, as elsewhere, it appears that Torrance is unable to escape proximity to the concept of imitation.

The goal in the life and ministry of the church is “conformity” to the life and ministry of Christ (Torrance, 1955:34, 38, 63, 84). Conformity implies that the “*Christological pattern* must be made to appear in the form and order of the Church” (Torrance, 1955:34; emphasis mine). Conformity is a “*spiritual reduplication* or fulfilment of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ” (Torrance, 1955:34; emphasis mine). It comes by participation in one baptism through the one Spirit. Conformity is an assumption, through participation, of the form of the Suffering Servant (Torrance, 1955:34, 84).

That said, the church is not, it appears, entirely without agency in this process. Torrance (1955:35) asserts that “the Church participates in His ministry by serving Him in history where it is sent by Him in fulfilment of His ministry”. He (Torrance, 1995:36; emphasis original) relates the ministry

of the church to the ministry of Christ, "... *not as the less to the greater, not as the part to the whole, but as the participation of the Church in the whole ministry of Christ*". He then also insists that the ministry of Christ is "absolutely unique". Torrance (1955:36–37) equivocates between these two seemingly paradoxical positions before finally conceding the difficulty of articulating the relationship. Instead of an ironclad definition, he offers statements of the two truths in question, which he believes to be "quite clear" (Torrance, 1955:37; emphasis original):

On the one hand there can be *no relation of identity*... On the other hand, the ministry of the Church is *not another ministry* different from the ministry of Christ, or separable from it.

We might describe the relation between the ministry of the church and that of Christ as distinct but inseparable, though to my knowledge Torrance never uses that exact phrase. In the end he leaves the tension unresolved, but his theology at large and his polemic statements specific to this issue portray an inclination to err towards identity of the ministries of Christ and his church, rather than their separation. This inclination comes through clearly in Torrance's (1955:37; emphasis mine) conclusion on the matter:

The Church that is baptised with Christ's Baptism and drinks His Cup engages in His ministry in a way appropriate to the redeemed and appropriate to the Body. Christ exercises His ministry in a way appropriate to the Redeemer and appropriate to the Head of the Body. Thus the relation between Christ's ministry and the Church's ministry is described in the New Testament in terms of the relation between the Head and the members of the Body, between the Lord and the servant, between the Householder and the steward, between the King and the herald: from beginning to end it is a relation of subordination and obedience. The Church *participates* in Christ's ministry by serving Him who is Prophet, Priest, and King.

The ministry of the Church is related to the ministry of Christ in such a way that in and through the ministry of the Church *it is always Christ Himself who is at work*, nourishing, sustaining, ordering, and governing His Church on earth. Through his Spirit he *commands and enables* the Church to minister in His name...

Thus Torrance holds that in the transformation of the church the end is conformity with Christ and the means is participation rather than imitation. It is perhaps noteworthy that in Torrance's description of the former, agency is objectively located, whereas in the latter, it is subjectively located.

Torrance avoids imitation not only by language choices in his own writings, but also in translation. He offers "Be ye *followers* of me" (Torrance, 1955:68; emphasis mine) as a summary translation of 1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 Corinthians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 1:6 and Philippians 3:17. The noun in question is *μιμηταί* (from *μιμητής*), which both the ESV and NASB translate as "imitators". In

fact, Torrance (1955:20, 93) himself translates *μίμησις* as “imitation” when he is referring to the Platonic doctrine. But here, when he is translating the Bible, he avoids the term. The inconsistency is suggestive of a commitment to downplaying any association with imitation in describing the Christian response.<sup>32</sup>

But what connotations of this word does Torrance wish to avoid? To reiterate, Torrance (1955:97) rejects the Platonic and Neoplatonic notion of imitation as transcription:

No transubstantiation or fusion is involved. The relation is truly sacramental and eschatological... it points beyond itself... it will pass away... it is not a translation into terms of space and time of a heavenly order... [it] must not be understood as if it were within history a replica of an eternal and celestial reality.

In short, there is nothing essential in the form of our temporal patterning of Christ (Torrance, 1955:98). It has no independent being or agency (Torrance, 1955:108).

As already stated, Torrance does not make his case only through a negative rejection of imitation. There are also many strong statements of the positive alternative, namely, participation (e.g., Torrance, 1955:29, 64, 65, 67, 81). Those that follow are exemplary:

The communion of the Spirit thus gives the Church to *participate* in the concrete embodiment of the Love of God in the Incarnate Son, so that the essential nature and being of the Church as love is its participation in Jesus Christ the New Man. Love in the Church *is precisely its participation* in the Humanity of Jesus Christ who is the love of God poured out for us and our salvation... the Church is Church *as it participates* in the active operation of the divine love. (Torrance, 1955:30; emphasis added).

Throughout the whole prophetic, priestly and kingly ministry of the Church, it is Christ Himself who presides as Prophet, Priest and King, but He summons the Church to engage in *His* ministry... (Torrance, 1955:38; emphasis original).

And so the Church on earth lives and moves and has its being in the Kingdom and Patience of Jesus. (Torrance, 1955:61).

A final passage is of great interest (Torrance, 1955:87; emphasis added):

*Only as [the Church] learns* to let the mind of Christ be in its mind, and is inwardly and outwardly shaped by His servant-obedience unto the death of the Cross, *can it participate* in His Prophetic, Priestly, and Kingly Ministry. It is in utter self-humiliation in *κένωσις*, in *ταπείνωσις* that the Church

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<sup>32</sup> This argument is developed in 3.2 below.

can *follow* in the steps of the Son of Man. It must be prepared to be so conformed to Him whose visage was marred more than any man's...

The implication appears to be that learning and following in some sense enable participation, or at least they are in reciprocal relation with participation. But learning and following are ideas normally associated with imitation, and here they appear to be necessary to full participation. Once again, Torrance wrestles, possibly unintentionally, with the mutual relation of participation and imitation in the Christian response. It appears that in rejecting Platonic imitation Torrance is rejecting any attempt at a subjectively located response with independent meaning. In its stead he proposes an objectively located response dependent on the response of Christ for any meaning. It is participation without identity. It is participation which simultaneously affirms the uniqueness of Christ's response and our absolute dependence on it.

This survey of *Royal Priesthood* reveals certain axiomatic principles in Torrance's understanding of the Christian life. An authentic response is by participation and not imitation. A Platonic doctrine of imitation has been assimilated into Christian theology, and it must be rejected as false. It is not as if the biblical imperative reads: 'Here is Christ's righteousness. Now repeat it.' On the contrary, Torrance argues, our following after Christ's righteousness is a mere witness to it. The two are not univocal. They may be analogous, but there is a categorical difference, a difference in quality, that exists between them. Indeed, Torrance's account of participation in Christ affirms the same principle. We only share in Christ's priesthood "*alius rationis*" (Torrance, 1955:81). Here, then, is another indication of Torrance's ubiquitous struggle to maintain a strong emphasis on participation to the exclusion of imitation.

### **2.2.2.3 Cheap and costly grace (1971)**

Torrance (1971:56–58) begins this chapter on justification by tracing an historical departure from the Reformation doctrine of grace within Protestant theology. On his reading, the ambiguity of a 'justifying faith' and the decoupling of 'faith alone' from 'grace alone' introduced the paradox of *conditional* grace to Protestant theology, such that the grace of God depends on human repentance and faith for its efficacy. This "subtle element of co-redemption" soon permeated "Protestantism, Lutheran Pietism, ... the Federal Theology of the Calvinists, Puritanism and Anglicanism alike" (Torrance, 1971:57–58). Instead of an emphasis on an objective Christ-event, much of Protestant gospel proclamation came to centre on subjective existential decision.

Torrance (1971:58–59) illustrates this subjective turn by pointing to the distance between Luther and Bultmann in their conception of *Christus pro me*. According to Torrance, Luther understood this as the objective fact of God's historical intervention in Christ on my behalf. For Bultmann,

Christ *for me* signifies what Christ *means to me*. Torrance argues that the two positions are antithetical. Bultmann rejected a focus on objective events as obscuring and retarding true faith, which must take responsibility (*for me*). His position is diametrically opposed to Luther's justification *extra nos*.

Bultmann stands as the archetype of a brand of Protestant theology "detached from the objective acts of God", which is the particular focus of Torrance's (1971:60) attack. If we are to understand Torrance, we must recognise that his theology has a polemic edge and he wields it very deliberately in the direction of Bultmann et al.<sup>33</sup>

Torrance (1971:60) concludes his short history as follows:

The great lesson to be learned from this is that whenever we take our eyes off the centrality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his objective vicarious work, the Gospel disappears behind man's existentialised self-understanding, and even the Reality of God himself is simply reduced to 'what He means for me' in the contingency and necessities of my own life purpose.

Any focus on Christian *subjectivity* is, for Torrance, a threat to the unique, vicarious, and *objective* person and work of Christ.

Next he considers the ethical implications of this 'great lesson' and its alternative. Justification by Christ alone (the correlative of faith alone and grace alone) means that Christ is the determinative centre of all Christian thought and action. On the contrary, where human thought and action are detached from the objective truth of Jesus Christ, they can only be a continuation of natural thought and action.

Torrance (1971:61) points to the categorical difference between a natural and a truly Christian ethic, expounded by Bultmann himself. The former constitutes accidental conformity, while the latter constitutes essential, personal commitment.<sup>34</sup> A natural ethic involves a detached and neutral compliance to an external standard or code of ethics. A truly Christian ethic emerges from a personal assent to what is required, not mere compliance with it. Jesus calls for this kind of radical obedience and removes the false protection of compliance to an external imperative. He thereby exposes man to the nakedness of responsibility before God. Thus far is Torrance in

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<sup>33</sup> Thus what may on first reading appear to be a strong amelioration of subjective Christian agency might simply be overblown rhetoric in reaction to his theological opponents. For example, a desire to stress the Divine subject over the human subject may go some way to explaining Torrance's muted account of the Christian response in general and biblical imitation in particular.

<sup>34</sup> This is akin to the difference between accidental conformity and the conformity to Christ by participation described in 2.2.2.2 above.

agreement with Bultmann.<sup>35</sup> But it is at this point that they part company, because Bultmann travels no further. Man is left alone to bear sole responsibility for his thought and action, whereas, according to Torrance, the gospel of justification by Christ proclaims that Jesus has stepped into our humanity to bear responsibility for us. This amounts to an ethical revolution in which all morality is set “on a wholly new basis” (Torrance, 1971:62). While Bultmann leaves man trapped in an existential crisis with only subjective self-will at his disposal, the gospel of justification by grace rests upon an objective decision already taken by Christ on our behalf. He occupies the objective centre of human existence which frees us *from* the bondage of self-will, *for* the selfless love of God and neighbour.

Next, Torrance explores how it is that Protestantism lost its way. He traces this diversion back to a predilection for detaching the work of Christ from his person. This is neatly captured in Melancthon’s dictum: “This is to know Christ, to know his benefits” (Torrance, 1971:63).<sup>36</sup> Detaching the work of Christ from his person (the atonement from the incarnation) meant that the work itself had no anchor in his objective historical person, and so any interpretation of those events became a radically subjective reading out of what had first been read in.

For Torrance the origin of the problem was an attempt in certain Protestant quarters to prioritise the work of Christ and then understand his person. Against this he argues that “we must allow the Person of Christ to determine for us the nature of His saving work, rather than the other way round”. Against Melancthon, Torrance (1971:64; emphasis original) quotes Calvin:

Since the whole affiance of our salvation rests in the obedience which he has rendered to God, His Father, in order that it might be imputed to us as if it were ours, we must possess Him: for His blessings are not ours, unless He gives Himself to us *first*.

Therefore our union with the person of Christ precedes any of his benefits, including justification. Regeneration, or renewal through union, precedes justification and comprises its “inner content”. Justification is not merely forensic. Because it implies and describes an ontological union, justification is a *participation* in the active obedience of Christ. It is not merely imputation. It is “the impartation to us of Christ’s own divine-human righteousness which we receive through union with him” (Torrance, 1971:64).

Torrance (1971:65) offers the Westminster Confession as an example of a Protestant reversal of this position. He claims that in the Confession a purely forensic justification precedes

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<sup>35</sup> And thus far does Bultmann resemble Kierkegaard, in the latter’s presentation of an existential Christian ethic (see the discussion of “a soteriological suspension of ethics” in 2.2.3 and 3.4 below).

<sup>36</sup> Is this a statement of detachment or attachment? Does it separate the person from the work, or declare their integration? The point is at least debatable.

sanctification, or growth “into union with Christ” (Torrance, 1971:65). From this and similar such distortions followed, with time, the detachment of incarnation from the atonement, of substitution from representation, of the sacraments from union with Christ, and with these, a moralising of the gospel. For Torrance, wherever Protestant theology jettisoned the ontological ground for salvation, an objective understanding of justification would soon give way to the subjective. The origin of the waywardness within Protestantism lay in focussing on the work of Christ and then, only subordinately, on his person.

The second part of the chapter is devoted to counting the “cost” of grace on humankind. In Torrance’s (e.g., 1971:56) thinking, grace is costly because it completely undermines the concept of human merit. Jesus, as the embodiment of this grace, “became the centre of a volcanic disturbance in human existence” (Torrance, 1971:66). He exposed the futility and corruption of an “independent” human existence and re-established human existence for God. This “volcanic disturbance” has a number of reverberations through the different dimensions of the human experience.

The “most apparent” of these (Torrance, 1971:66), and for our purposes the most apposite, is in the moral life. Here the radical unconditional nature of the grace that justifies implicates all humanity as sinful and needy before God. The breadth and depth of grace embodied in the life and death of Jesus stands as judgement over all human merit, and finds it wanting. Torrance illustrates with Holy Communion, where “we feel shame for our whole being, for our good as well as for our evil” and where we can “plead only the merits of the Saviour” (Torrance, 1971:66). Here the Christian is an agent, but never, it seems, an agent unto righteousness apart from Christ.

Torrance (1971:66–70) works through a similar logic in the area of knowledge. All our knowledge is coordinated and “verified” by reference to the justifying grace in the person of Jesus Christ. Here Torrance reapplies the basic principles and presuppositions already applied to justification. In knowing, the emphasis is on the objective, rather than the subjective, and any object of knowledge must be known *κατὰ φύσιν*, according to its nature. Nowhere is this principle more binding than in the knowledge of God, who can only be known by gracious self-revelation in Christ. He is the truth, and any merely subjective human criterion of truth comes under the judgement of his gracious self-disclosure as yet another form of human self-justification.

Likewise with religion (Torrance, 1971:70–71). It is only the utterly gracious presence of Christ that imbues religion with meaning and worth, and his absence renders religion nothing more than “man’s cultural self-expression”. Worse still (Torrance citing Barth, 1971:69):

Just because religion is the supreme possibility of all human possibilities... [it is] the chief means by which sin insinuates itself into human existence... and the human subject sets himself on the throne of the divine subject.

Once again the problem is an overblown subjectivity, and once again the remedy is a “religion of grace” in which we worship in and from the objective truth of God in Christ, and in which “we live out of God and not out of ourselves” (Torrance, 1971:70). Indeed, for Torrance (1971:70), “... justification calls for... a displacement of the self by Jesus Christ, and therefore a relentless objectivity...” It is only from this objective centre in Jesus Christ that the Christian is free to love, know and worship.

Even as Torrance (1971:73) declares that we must “let Christ be everything” as the one who made “Himself responsible for us”, he immediately moves to counter the conclusion that this implies the end of human agency. He does so by proffering the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Torrance lauds Bonhoeffer’s decision to be part of a plot to assassinate Hitler as one that demonstrates “his readiness to take a decision and to bear full responsibility for it”. Clearly, he does not view participation in Christ as the end of human responsibility. What Torrance is celebrating in this decision is Bonhoeffer’s courage to forsake all external props in making it, including tradition, Scripture and Christian leadership. Confronted with justification by grace alone, Bonhoeffer abandoned any religious self-justification masquerading as faith, for faith in Christ alone. This empowered him to bear full responsibility, knowing that his justification did not depend on any decision he might take, and that all his decisions stood under the judgement of grace.

Torrance uses Bonhoeffer’s epistemology to help clarify his ethics. He (Torrance, 1971:75) argues that Bonhoeffer advocated thinking on two levels – the theological and the natural. Thinking on each level must be conducted in accordance with the nature of that level, or *κατὰ φύσιν*. Thus, thinking on the level of the natural world must be conducted *etsi Deus non daretur* (as if God did not exist). This split-level thinking has biblical warrant in the doctrine of the Creator God and the rationality he breathed into creation that renders creation knowable without direct reference to God.

Torrance (1971:76) asks the provocative question: How can Bonhoeffer consistently apply the principle of *etsi Deus non daretur* to ethics? Does it imply a godless, secular morality? Torrance immediately rules such a conclusion out of court given Bonhoeffer’s stated point of departure (the reality of God in Christ) and his stated objective (proclaiming the God of the Bible). On the contrary, *etsi Deus non daretur* must be understood in terms of what Bonhoeffer considered fundamental – justification by grace alone. In justification by grace alone, there is no confusion of the levels – man is justified by the free agency of God in Christ alone, and this affords him the

free agency and responsibility to live from a centre other than himself. Thus, “man is so emancipated from himself that he is genuinely free for spontaneous action toward God and toward his fellow men” (Torrance, 1971:77). Instead of asking, ‘How can I be good?’ man is free to ask, ‘What is the will of God?’

Torrance (1971:77–78) avers that Bonhoeffer’s principle of *etsi Deus non daretur* and method of thinking in levels do not equate to the dualism implied by some versions of the Lutheran ‘two Kingdoms’ scheme. Strict separation between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the World, between a secular and a religious sphere, between the jurisdictions of the state and of the church is precisely what Bonhoeffer was trying to avoid. When the dualism of separate spheres is compounded by the philosophical dualism between the noumenal and the phenomenal, as per Bultmann, “then the disjunction between the Christian gospel and its practical application becomes very wide indeed” (Torrance, 1971:77). The believer is forced to choose between Christ and the world, and the two are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, Bonhoeffer integrates the two “worlds” into the single reality of God in Christ, who by his incarnation assumes our reality and by his nature participates in both the divine being and in created existence. Believers, who participate in Christ, experience the reality of both God and the world. We “must learn” to live out of a centre in Christ in the reality of the world he assumed (Torrance, 1971:78).

Bonhoeffer therefore rejects dualism and instead thinks in terms of two distinct but inseparable levels with interaction between the two. His ethic is rooted in a Christology which holds the Godhead and manhood of Christ together inseparably; which moves from a starting point in the person of Christ to an interpretation of his work; which grounds our salvation in his ontology. In short, Bonhoeffer’s ethic is “rooted both in the Person of Christ and in his active obedience” (Torrance, 1971:78).

Next, Torrance highlights the way in which modern theology tends to confuse the two levels of thought by using criteria from the natural world to explain theological phenomena. As one example he cites Bultmann, who explains the supernatural in the Bible as “projections out of man’s self-understanding” (Torrance, 1971:79), or myth. He should, according to Torrance, be trying to understand miracles according to the nature of their reality, that is, theologically. Next, Torrance cites the example of John Robinson, who, according to Torrance, rejects traditional theism as promoting a god of the gaps who is a being, or a person. Instead he proposes God as the ground of our being. Again, Torrance argues that Robinson has failed to think theologically about God according to his nature. Being and person must be understood according to the nature of God. The result of Robinson’s approach is that there is no discernible distinction between God and the human self. Ironically, underlying his error is a radical dualism between the natural world and the divine world that admits of no causal interaction between the two. Torrance (1971:81) describes

this conception as “an inverted form of deism”, where God is present as the ground of the subjective human being, but indistinguishable from it, and therefore powerless to overrule it.<sup>37</sup>

Instead of the modern confusion of the two levels of knowledge, Torrance proposes that we know each level objectively according to its nature and that the nature of each determines our knowledge of the interaction between the levels. The relation is one of grace. Grace articulates both the distinction between God and the natural order he created, and the dependence of the latter on the former. It is only this understanding of the natural order’s relation to God that “observes its utter contingency and obstructs its divinization” (Torrance, 1971:82). Torrance (1971:83) labels as “crazy” the common idea that in order to preserve distinctness between God and his creation you must disallow any kind of interaction between the two.

To close the chapter, Torrance illustrates this modern problem by applying it to the doctrine of justification and in particular *simul justus et peccator*. On one level of thought, we are justified by God. On the other, we continue to sin. Torrance (1971:83) notes that Luther approached the topic dialectically from below, that is, from “under the veil of this visible world”. Luther therefore stressed the relation as one of imputation. Torrance argues that there is another side to Luther’s thought. We are justified by a creative act of the Word of God, so that we are made righteous by impartation. Moreover, the reality of justification is derived from the person and work of Christ, and comes to us via the real presence of Christ in the elements of the Lord’s Supper. Modern theology tends to focus on the lower level and so it lets “a merely imputational or forensic relation between *justus* and *peccator* replace a real, dynamic relation, with the result that justification comes to be thought of as an *empty legal fiction*” (emphasis original; Torrance, 1971:84). Against this, Torrance (1971:85) reminds us of Luther’s emphasis on union with Christ, and he once again proposes participation in Christ as the remedy to the “radical dichotomy between the world of the divine Reality and this world of space and time”.

In his epistemology, Christology and soteriology, Torrance insists on a relentless objectivity centred in the integrated reality of God in Christ. It is hardly surprising that the same relentless objectivity extends to his ethics, in which the believer lives not from an independent centre in himself, but rather by participation in Jesus Christ. In this, Torrance largely ignores the notion of imitation, presumably because it implies a far more subjective agency.

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<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that here we have Torrance arguing against the elision of God’s agency into ours, whereas he is accused of eliding our agency into God’s (e.g., Baker, 2010:42–43). Instead of dissolving the agency of God into our subjectivity, does he dissolve human agency into the objectivity of God? This is one way of framing the question this study intends to answer.

### 2.2.3 A “soteriological suspension of ethics”

Torrance (1992b:252) makes a call for a “soteriological suspension of ethics” in a chapter on “the Atonement and the moral order”. What does he mean by it? The entire chapter serves as context, but here we will focus on certain salient features of his argument.

Torrance (1992b:245–249) argues for the universal range of Christ’s redemptive work. He argues that atonement embraces the whole created order, including all of humanity, though he denies that this necessarily implies ‘universalism’, ordinarily understood. Such an implication is founded upon reading finite fallen logico-causal connections into the being and agency of God, as well as a rationalisation of evil. On the contrary, for Torrance, the paradox of unlimited atonement without universalism is shrouded in divine mystery, and to suggest otherwise is to “come very near to sinning against the Holy Spirit” (Torrance, 1992b:247). Therefore, he includes within the unlimited range of atonement the created moral and rational order in its entirety.

Next, Torrance (1992b:249) identifies what he perceives to be the problem in our understanding of the relation between the atonement and the moral order. His statement of the problem is familiar by now. According to Torrance, within the Western theological tradition both Catholics and Protestants alike have fallen prey to a dualism in their thinking that separates the person from the work of Christ. This separation allows and even promotes an understanding of atonement as taking place within the confines of the moral judicial order. As such, it is external to the person of Christ and therefore external to the Godhead and the ontology of mankind, raising questions over its efficacy. Torrance argues further that this dualism must inevitably extend to our understanding of the person of Christ where it jeopardises the coherence of hypostatic union and Christ’s role as mediator between God and Man.<sup>38</sup> Torrance (1992b:250) concludes that when the atonement is detached from its integrating centre in the incarnate person of Christ, our understanding disintegrates into multiple ‘theories of atonement’. He suggests the history of Western theology has followed exactly that course.

The remedy, for Torrance (1992b:249, 251), is to be found 1) in acknowledging the universal reach of Christ’s atoning work and 2) in removing the underlying dualism by integrating the person and work of Christ. If the reach of the redeeming work of Christ in the atonement is universal, then it must include the moral order, rather than vice versa. And if the person and work of Christ are integrated, then an ontological understanding will replace an external, legal understanding. If

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<sup>38</sup> This could, however, be a non sequitur. Does it necessarily follow that if we consider Christ and his work separately, and the atonement in judicial terms, then we must inevitably deny the hypostatic union? A full investigation of this question is beyond the scope of this study, but here let me tentatively suggest an answer in the negative.

atonement is a function of Christ's ontological union with God and his simultaneous ontological union with mankind, then it cannot be characterised as an external, judicial transaction within the confines of a moral order which itself requires rescue. On the contrary, since the law is perverted by sin and serves to separate man and God, "the whole moral order had to be redeemed and be set on a new basis through the atonement" (Torrance, 1992b:249). In other words, we do not interpret the atonement by the moral order. We interpret the moral order by the atonement. The atonement does not take place within the moral order. It transforms the moral order.

It is this radical transformation of the whole moral order effected by the atonement that Torrance (1992b:252) calls "a soteriological suspension of ethics". It implies "a new moral life that flows from grace in which external legal relation is replaced by inner filial relation to God the Father" (Torrance, 1992b:252). Ethics as the "unredeemed moral order" (Torrance, 1992b:254), or law-keeping, cannot deal with sin and does not save. Rather, it is suspended in the salvation wrought by Christ.

Torrance (1992b:253) argues that now, in the era of suspended ethics, the moral life of the believer is no longer governed by the "imperatives of law" but "inwardly" by "the indicatives of God's love" which are mediated to us by the Spirit of God. He concludes that the atonement as the filial relation of the Son to the Father has replaced the imperatives of law as the ultimate ground of the moral order (Torrance, 1992b:254). Jesus embodies the new moral order, and it takes the form of his righteous obedient Sonship. By our union with Christ in the Spirit, the Son-Father relation is translated into the daily life of the Christian. We undergo ontological change and share in the new humanity that he has created. Thus, for Torrance, a soteriological suspension of ethics implies ontological participation in the atoning life and death of Christ.

### **2.2.3.1 "Soteriological suspension": the origins of the phrase in Kierkegaard**

Torrance (2009:118) adapts the phrase from Kierkegaard, and thus to understand it fully we must return to Kierkegaard's original intention. Kierkegaard (1983:54) begins with definitions. The ethical is the universal. It has no telos beyond itself. It is the telos for everything outside itself. The individual has their telos in the universal. The ethical demand is that they submit their singularity to the universal. On the contrary, sin is the affirmation of singularity over against the universal.

Kierkegaard (1983:55) disturbs this conceptual inertia by introducing the paradox of faith, in which the single individual is elevated above the universal and above the social morality of ethics. The paradox of faith is that the single individual stands justified above the ethical universal in absolute, unmediated relation to the absolute (Kierkegaard, 1983:56). This is what Kierkegaard (1983:56) labels a "teleological suspension of the ethical". It is exemplified in the story of Abraham and Isaac

in Genesis 22. For Kierkegaard, Abraham is either a murderer or a man of faith.<sup>39</sup> There is no third category. The ethical demand of the universal is that a father should love his son. Abraham is in breach of this ethical demand, and there is no other mediating middle term by which he can be justified as a tragic hero (Kierkegaard, 1983:57).

But Abraham, by “virtue of the absurd” and by the paradox of faith, transcends the universal in submission to a higher telos, namely, the will of God. In this paradox, the temptation to refute the will of God and to dereliction of duty is the ethical itself. If he were to love his son and turn back from Mount Moriah, he would fail in his duty to God. How then is Abraham not condemned a murderer? He has faith. By submission to a higher telos, the ethical is suspended and Abraham is justified. “This is the paradox by which [Abraham] remains at the apex... he as the single individual places himself in an absolute relation to the absolute” (Kierkegaard, 1983:62). This is what Kierkegaard means by “a teleological suspension of the ethical”.

Torrance clearly imports some of Kierkegaard’s meaning when he recasts the phrase as a “soteriological suspension of the ethics”. But there are significant differences. Firstly, Kierkegaard is concerned with the subjective existential decision involved in faith: “[Abraham] as a single individual places himself in an absolute relation to the absolute”. Torrance is concerned with participation in the objective person and active obedience of Christ. It is in Torrance’s scheme not our faith that elevates to a higher telos, but Christ’s faithfulness. We share in Christ’s faithfulness by his ontological union with us in the incarnation, and his spiritual union with us, effected by the Holy Spirit and received by faith. The nature of the suspension is as different as the distance between objective and subjective poles in the Christ–Christian relation. Moreover, the epistemological foundations of the two are also radically different. Whereas Kierkegaard (E.H. Hong and V.H. Hong in historical introduction to Kierkegaard, 1983:xxiv) subscribes to a brand of Lessing’s idealism, Torrance can be categorised a critical realist. As such, they differ vastly on the relation of history to truth. For Torrance, truth is historically grounded in the person and work of Christ, whereas for Kierkegaard, this would seem impossible.

That said, both argue for the suspension of the ethical in favour of an immediate relation with the absolute. For Torrance, this comes by participation in Christ. For Kierkegaard, it comes by the

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<sup>39</sup> Perhaps Torrance had Kierkegaard’s account of Abraham in mind when he proffered Bonhoeffer as an example of someone who understood the implications of participation in Christ for human agency. Just as Abraham was either murderer or man of faith, so too Bonhoeffer was either murderer or man of faith. Both were prevented from the deed by Providence, but both had murderous intent founded on what they believed was the will of God. The “will of God” is an important concept for both Kierkegaard and Bonhoeffer.

paradox of faith. They arrive at the same conviction from opposite ends of the subjective–objective spectrum.

## **2.3 Webster**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

Having considered the theology of Thomas Torrance from presupposition through to ethical entailment, I now present the theology of John Webster as a foil. The aim is that the similarities and differences between the two will cast Torrance in starker relief, in order that we might better understand him and his conception of Christian agency.

### **2.3.2 Webster: his presuppositions and the contours of his theology**

#### **2.3.2.1 Theological method and content**

We begin with the epilogue to the first volume of Webster's (2016a:213–224) working papers in theology, in which he asks: 'What makes theology theological?' Dealing with the postscript first offers insight into the basic elements of method that repeat throughout his systematic theology, and also offers insight into the theological differences between Torrance and Webster. To answer the question requires, according to Webster, understanding of theology's object, cognitive principles, ends, and virtues of practice.

The objects of theology are God and all things relative to God. The first of this twofold object is God the Holy Trinity. This first object is considered from two aspects: the absolute and the relative. God considered absolutely is God in his divine being, divine attributes and aseity as Father, Son and Spirit, prior to any relation with the created order. This aspect includes consideration of the divine processions as relations of paternity, filiation and spiration. Considering God relatively, theology explores the relation of God in his being and inner works to that which he has created. Thus the being and processions of God are principal; the temporal missions are derivative. The outward movement of God is entirely gratuitous. Nevertheless it is rooted in his being and therefore indispensable to theology. The outward movement of God cannot be overemphasised or neglected if theology is to be theological.

The second object of theology is all things relative to God. There are three noteworthy appendages to this statement. First, as alluded to above, 'all things relative to God' is a necessary entailment to theology. Second, attention to 'all things relative to God' is derived from attention to God. The second part of theology's twofold object is derived from the first. God in his inner goodness and love is creative. The missions flow from the processions. Third, 'all things' must be treated as '*relative to God*'. Theology is the science of everything, but only as everything relative

to God. In other words, “[Theology] considers creatures not absolutely but relatively, as caused and as caused causes, as realities which live and move and have their being in God” (Webster, 2016a:215).<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, this order – God and then all things relative to God – is an irreversible order of priority and proportion in emphasis. Noting this uncovers the inner tension that dominates the theological enterprise: that its principal object is entirely beyond its grasp. In the modern era this has resulted in a turn away from the principal object of theology towards its secondary object (Webster, 2016a:215):

Faced with this restriction the temptation is to evade its demand by passing on quickly to other things – to the works of God in the economy, or to creatures, believing these things more manageable. We may be more disposed to take this turn as inheritors of a long history in which the order of discovery from created things to God has been projected onto the order of being, in such a way that God in himself drifts to the periphery of theological concern.

Webster may well have considered Torrance to have fallen prey to such temptation.

Webster (2016a:215–216) identifies two cognitive principles of theological knowledge. The objective principle is “God’s infinite knowledge of himself”,<sup>41</sup> and the subjective principle is “regenerate human intelligence”. God’s knowledge of himself is beyond measure. It is “a simple act of intuition of unrestricted scope”. Moreover, this first principle is operative and, as such, the ground and guarantee of the second. God’s objective knowledge of himself is the cause of all creaturely subjective knowledge of God. It is an invitation to *rational* fellowship. That said, God condescends to mediate his knowledge of himself by creaturely assistants in creaturely form, which makes ectypal theological knowledge possible.

The subjective theological principle is an acknowledgement that “Divine revelation is not manifestation *tout court*” and “its telos is not reached apart from its activation of the work of the created intellect” (Webster, 2016a:217). Here is a principle that could be applied to human agency in general. It represents an obvious departure from Torrance, who stresses the objective principle in his theological epistemology and in his account of the relation between divine and human agency. Indeed, Webster (2016a:217) cautions against an excessive chastening of creaturely cognitive pretension that “threatens to eliminate the human knower”. He argues that, instead of

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<sup>40</sup> Here we have echoes of Aristotle’s First Mover and chain of causes, which Torrance would perhaps identify as evidence of the influence of Greek habits of thought.

<sup>41</sup> Again, this resonates with Aristotle’s conception of God as self-thinking thought. And again, one wonders what Torrance would make of such a statement.

magnifying divine agency, undermining subjective human agency in knowing renders divine agency restricted and ineffectual.

Rather than eliding creaturely intelligence into divine intelligence (the subjective into the objective principle), Webster proposes three positive qualifications of creaturely intelligence. First, created intelligence is bestowed by God. It is a moved movement of the creaturely intellect. Second, created intelligence is finite and always in process. Third, created intelligence is fallen and unregenerate. Intelligence is subject to all the usual corruption of the fallen nature. When it is reborn, it is liberated from vanity and imbued with power to turn to its proper object.

In considering the ends of theology, Webster (2016a:219–221) distinguishes ends from purposes. Purposes are motivated by human desire and intent. Ends, on the contrary, describe the full actualisation or realisation of the nature of the thing in question. When a thing arrives at the fullness of its nature, it has achieved its end. However, because human beings are rational and moral agents, the fulfilment of our nature involves intent, and thus an interaction between purpose and end. Theology is theological when purposes agree with ends. Theology pursues scientific ends since it is part of human nature to accumulate knowledge and have intellectual appetite, and revelation stimulates this appetite. That said, scientific ends are merely instrumental, and our fallen natures imply that our purpose aligns with the instrumental rather than the ultimate. Theology pursues contemplative ends. Contemplation is a “simple gaze”, “rapt attention” or concentrated focus on God. Under the hidden assumption that only the historical is real, modern theology has turned away from contemplation of God to the pursuit of other scientific ends in the economy or in morality. Despite lamenting this trend, Webster also affirms that theology must pursue practical ends. Indeed, proper contemplation – contemplation that holds to its primary object while pushing out – ends in human practice, because divine truth necessarily governs human conduct. In a closing thought on the ends of theology, Webster asserts that the appropriation of ends can take place only within a context of ongoing mortification and vivification, the baptismal pattern given by Christ.

Finally, Webster (2016a:222–224) addresses the practice of theology. In our fallen state, purposes diverge from ends and curiosity replaces contemplation. In the regenerate nature, on the other hand, purpose and end converge, and mere curiosity gives way to an insatiable hunger for divine instruction. Theology that is truly theological will always be attended by the practices of religion – those practices which give expression to our rational fellowship with God. Fellowship with God is the setting for all of the Christian life, not least the regenerate intellectual life.

Such is Webster’s conception of theology and how it should be conducted. It gives important insight into his presuppositions and his method, which will prove valuable in tracing out his

doctrinal positions in order to contrast and compare them with those of Torrance. Ultimately they will help explain the divergence of the two theologians over participation and imitation and the role of human agency in the Christian life. We begin to draw that contrast in more detail below.

Webster (2016a:3) opens volume 1 of his “working papers on theology” with this statement on the nature of theology:

Christian theology is a work of regenerate intelligence, awakened and illuminated by divine instruction to consider a twofold object. This object is, first, God in himself in the unsurpassable perfection of his inner being and work as Father, Son and Spirit and in his outer operations, and, second and by derivation, all other things relative to him. Christian divinity is characterized both by the scope of its matter – it aims at a comprehensive treatment of God and creatures – and by the material order of that treatment, in which theology proper precedes and governs economy. All things have their origin in a single transcendent animating source; a system of theology is so to be arranged that the source, the process of derivation and the derivatives may in due order become objects of contemplative and practical attention.

We can immediately recognise points of resonance and dissonance with Torrance. The material order, in which “theology proper precedes and governs economy”, is at once a point of both resonance and dissonance. As already discussed, Torrance is a great advocate of this principle in his Christology, where he fingers the reverse as a serious flaw in Protestant thinking. Torrance rejects Melancthon’s dictum (“This is to know Christ, to know his benefits”) and insists that Christ’s work be anchored in his person and understood by it. Webster appears to espouse the same underlying principle, without allowing for any separation of divine being and agency (cf. Webster, 2016a:5), as per Torrance. A second point of agreement is the priority of God in the theological system. God is the “single transcendent animating source” of all theology.

At this foundational level there is significant resonance between Torrance and Webster. But there is also significant dissonance. “Christian theology is a work of regenerate intelligence” – this statement by Webster, even with its subsequent qualification, appears to fall short of the thoroughgoing knowledge by participation in Christ that Torrance advocates. It suggests too much in the way of subjective agency to concur with Torrance’s brand of critical realism. Indeed, elsewhere Webster (1986a:314) criticises an over-zealous commitment to realism and speaks of some of the attractions of theological idealism (Webster, 2016a:10). Torrance might also have objected to the word “system” used in association with the theological enterprise, since it implies the kind of a logico-causal human construct that he associated with the Latin heresy.

Torrance's greatest objection would probably have come, however, against Webster's (2016a:6) apparent endorsement of a separation between the *κόσμος αἰσθητός* and the *κόσμος νοητός*, between the sensible and the intelligible, the visible and the invisible:

If [theology is oriented chiefly to invisible things], then the matter of revelation (*revelata*) is not simply identical with the form or medium of revelation (*modus revelationis*). Revelation is not an historical quantity *tout court*, even – especially – in the hypostatic union and the Son's temporal exercise of his offices. There is, of course, historical form which theological reflection may not pass over; but that form has not only an unforgettable density but also a finality, and therefore an instrumental character, such that spiritual intelligence may not terminate there. Revelation beckons theological intelligence to consider the cause of revelation, and to receive it as an embassy of that which cannot be resolved into or exhausted by historical manifestation. Each act and word of the incarnate one has force only because he has come down.

This contains echoes of the fundamental error that Torrance traces back to Clement and Augustine – *the* dualism at the root of the Latin heresy. Webster (2016a:195) is not unaware of this line of criticism: he admires in French Dominican theologian Yves Congar a “confidence that – though Western Christian history stumbled rather badly around the end of the thirteenth century – we can with care recover the losses and extricate ourselves from the dualisms which have trapped theology and the estranged confessions of the churches.”

That said, it is notable that from this strong distinction between form and matter, between the visible and the invisible, and between Revelation and Revealer, Webster argues for the instrumental character of the incarnation. Again, for Torrance this would pose a major violation of the inner reason and central pattern of theology, in which, by the incarnation, the form and matter of Revelation coalesce.

Moreover, Webster (2016a:7–8) makes negative allusion to the modern theological commitment to critical realism and “Christological maximalism”:

... a wide variety of modern doctrinal projects are animated by convictions about the irreducibility of teaching about *deus revelatus*: God is who he is in his (outer) works, and those works arrest the attention of theological intelligence with such critical force that it is by them that the differentia of the Christian confession are to be identified. Persuasion of this may gain strength from other features: a certain historical and kerygmatic density in the presentation of God's acts, along with a vivid sense of the temporally unfolding character of the relation between God and creatures; Christological maximalism; impatience with metaphysics [etc.]...

The coherence of God himself and God in his revelatory acts is, however, best articulated, not by making the economy *id quo maius cogitari nequit*, but by indicating the continuous identity of the

acting subject in God's inner and outer works... The divine agent of revelatory acts is not fully understood if the phenomenality of those acts is treated as something primordial, a wholly sufficient presentation of the agent. God's outer works bear a surplus within themselves; they refer back to the divine agent who exceeds them...

God and creatures are incommensurable, and God's presence and action in time does not entail that his relation to creatures is a real relation.

It is highly questionable whether Torrance would permit any insufficiency in the revelation wrought by the incarnation, or allow for any doubt over the reality of the Creator-creature relation which the incarnation brings about. Here we have another departure between the two theologians.

Finally, Webster (2016a:10) characterises theological knowledge as an ectypal copy of the divine archetype. This is conceptually close to the Platonic imitation that Torrance rejects, though Webster describes this kind of knowledge as wholly relative and derivative. It is not surprising, therefore, that Webster allows for imitation in the Christian life and ethics, whereas Torrance openly rejects imitation, or at least the Platonic variety.

### **2.3.2.2 Christology**

We gain deeper insight into these agreements and disagreements in Webster's (2016a:43-59; 2015:611-627) essay on *The place of Christology in systematic theology*. Webster's (2016a:43) basic thesis is that Christology is not, as it is so often presented in modern theology, the "basis, centre, or starting point of everything else"; rather it is a principal and indispensable part of Christian doctrine with a wide dogmatic distribution. It is the Trinity, rather than Christology, which must hold the place of pre-eminence in Christian teaching. Webster's position is obviously at variance with that of Torrance, and this variance is explored below.

To begin with, Webster (2016a:44) again makes it clear that he is not naïve about the range of criticisms levelled against the systematic project, some of which are raised by Torrance. He defends the exercise as an articulation of the ordered relations internal to the object of the Christian faith and therefore inherent to the various elements of Christian doctrine. Moreover, it must proceed with deep awareness of its innate deficiency and ongoing renovation.

For Webster (2016a:45-46), the object of systematic theology is "God and all things relative to God", that is, God considered absolutely in his being and internal relations (theology), and God considered relative to his works (economy). Webster (2016a:46) argues for the material priority of theology over economy because it is possible to conceive of God without creation, but creation without God is inconceivable. In other words, the material priority of theology over the economy

mirrors the priority of the Creator over the created order, and is rooted in the aseity of God. Indeed, the aseity of God provides the context for Webster's thinking on the proper locus of Christology.

Webster adds three qualifications to his assertion of the priority of theology over economy. First, the two are distinct but inseparable (Webster, 2016a:46):

The material primacy of theology does not eliminate or depreciate all else relative to God; it indicates that theology treats the uncaused cause of all other things, and economy treats those things which are caused.

As is evidenced below, Webster makes much of the necessity of backward inference from effect to cause in systematic theology. This is a significant point of divergence from Torrance, who had a pronounced aversion to theology as logico-causal system-building.

The second qualification of the priority of theology over economy is that economy elucidates theology, though it does not exhaust it. Third, the priority of theology need not be replicated in the order of knowing or in exposition. That said, neither the order of knowing nor the order of exposition must be allowed to undermine the material order. Webster's (2016a:47) thesis can be summarised by his axiom, "first the worker, then the work".

Since Christology is distributed across both theology and economy as it considers both the eternal Word and the Word in time, Webster (2016a:47) argues that any proper treatment will recognise one domain as it treats the other, and recognise the material order of the two.

In treating the *terminus a quo*, systematic theology is not proposing some abstract, speculative reality unconnected to the history of the incarnation. It is simply following the rule of Christian faith that the invisible God is infinitely more real than any visible thing, the one by virtue of whom any visible thing has being and effect. The visible reality of the Word in time emerges from his participation in the entire sufficiency and repose of God.

Webster (2016a:48) adds that any relation that the Word has with creation is non-real, that is, non-constitutive. Here we find the aseity of God resulting in the material priority of theology over economy in a manner that appears to sanction a split between the *κόσμος αἰσθητός* and the *κόσμος νοητός* and claim a higher-order reality for the latter. If that is the case, it would constitute a clear example of Torrance's Latin heresy, and he would reject it out of hand. Even so, Webster denies that this move results in any abstraction, speculation or separation from the reality of the incarnation.

It is telling that Webster (2016a:48–49) turns to Aquinas as an exemplar of his position. Torrance (1990:222), on the other hand, considers Aquinas important in perpetuating and developing the

Latin heresy. Webster expounds Aquinas's teaching that the incarnation is an effect and instrument of the divinity of Christ. The historical phenomenon is only intelligible from the perspective of the divine person who assumes the human nature, and not vice versa. Webster (2016a:49) goes on to quote Aquinas:

We... judge the disposition and quality of instruments by their purpose, though also by the dignity of the one using them. Therefore, it is appropriate to esteem the quality of the human nature assumed by the Word of God in accordance with these norms.

As mentioned above, Torrance would never admit that the incarnation be cast as effect or instrument. Moreover, the quote from Aquinas appears to preclude the possibility of the assumption of a sinful human nature, or at least makes it doubtful. And yet, the assumption of a sinful human nature is a foundational premise for Torrance.

Next, Webster goes on to consider the two domains of Christology, namely, theology and economy. In the domain of theology (2016a:49–50), Webster highlights the eternal deity of the Son, his place in the eternal processions, and his eternal filiation. This core is founded upon two truths. First, the Son is complete without creatures and creates out of fullness; and, therefore, second, the inner life of the Son moves beyond itself as a consequence of its supreme creative goodness. On this basis Webster (2016a:50) concludes that the divine procession of the Son is the “vital principle” of his external mission. Stated otherwise, in a manner likely to be disagreeable to Torrance, the procession of the Son from the Father is the “uncaused cause” of the incarnation. Indeed, Webster (2016a:51; emphasis original) goes on to argue that “Christological knowledge is *knowledge by causes*” such that the visible historical Jesus is only intelligible by the invisible. Once again, the split between the visible and the invisible, with ‘merely’ causal connection between the two, is what Torrance would label heresy. And yet, Webster considers neglect of Christological knowledge by causes a prominent reason for the modern theological shift in emphasis from the domain of theology to the domain of economy.

In his treatment of the economic domain, Webster once again argues that the relative flows from the absolute. It is interesting to note at this point that Webster (2016a:51) views the telos of the economy not as theosis, as per Torrance, but as the “renewal of creaturely existence”. This is suggestive of his determination to maintain the Creator–creature divide, a divide Torrance struggles to maintain in light of his emphasis on the atoning and eschatological significance of the hypostatic union.

In assessing the motive for considering the economy, Webster (2016a:51) rejects the Kantian preclusion of any real knowledge of the noumenal. He avers that the only real motive is a tracing of the “outward movement of God’s communicative goodness” (Webster, 2016a:52), where the

hinge between theology and economy is the eternal will of God effected in time. The work of Christ is distributed across works of nature and of grace and therefore not confined to the work of redemption. Moreover, while Christ may be eminent in the work of redemption, every work of God is a work of the Trinity, with the Father as fount, the Son as medium, and the Spirit as terminus. While Torrance lays the accent on the work of redemption in what he calls incarnational atonement or atoning incarnation, there is some resonance in the affirmation of the three persons at work: *from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit*.

Webster (2016a:53) offers as another reason for the distributed nature of the work of Christ the fact that it accounts for both the objective and subjective aspects of soteriology. Torrance, on the other hand, stresses the objective nature of soteriology.

According to Webster (2016a:53), modern theology skews the relation of the theological and economic domains towards the latter, and therefore displaces the locus of Christology. It does so because of its underlying allegiance to various principles of reason. These include the following: 1) The centrality of Christology as the differentiating feature of the Christian faith; 2) The absolute nature of the history of Jesus, and with it the implied exclusion of the incarnation as effect or instrument; 3) The priority of the integrity of the personal agency of Jesus Christ over the proper distinction of his natures; 4) The collapse of divine being into divine act; 5) The priority of the outer works of God in epistemology; 6) Avoiding abstraction in the doctrine of God by emphasis on Christology rather than teaching on the Trinity. Many of these are espoused by Torrance.

Webster identifies theological and non-theological factors that favour the use of these principles. The primary theological factor is an identification of revelation with the incarnation, such that revelation *is* the incarnation. One consequence of this “strong identity” is to “close the space between God absolutely considered and God relatively considered” (Webster, 2016a:54). It seems that closing such a space is precisely what Torrance is aiming to do. Indeed, Webster (2016a:54) specifically implicates Torrance in this error, a position in which “God’s immanent self and God’s revealed self... are not simply coherent but identical”.

Non-theological factors resulting in the use of modern principles of reason include Kantian restrictions on metaphysics, the “valorisation of history”, and a reduced confidence in tracing causes from effects. The overall outcome from the deployment of these principles in the modern era has been an expansion of the economic domain of Christology at the expense of the theological domain (Webster, 2016a:54). Again, a theologian like Torrance may well be implicated here.

Finally, Webster (2016a:56–57) proffers three examples of modern systematic theology in Dörner, Ritschl and Barth. His treatment of Ritschl demonstrates the damage of transposing Kant onto Christology such that Christology reduces to soteriology, and soteriology to the subjective experience of the moral-religious community. Webster (2016a:56) describes Barth as marrying a profound Christological focus with patristic teaching on the incarnation, Reformed teaching on the hypostatic union, and a fervent rejection of the tendency towards moralism. Each one of these descriptors is also true of Barth's student, Torrance.

Webster (2016a:56) argues that, while Barth strongly professed Christology as central and determinative, in practice he was far more balanced. A fear of "master principles", a desire to allow for the freedom of God's Word, and a sensitivity to the range of doctrinal topics – all moved Barth to the practical conviction that a focus on Christology must not impinge on divine freedom or the "integrity of the human creature". The latter is of great importance in this study, and the question at hand is whether Torrance arrived at the same conviction with the same sort of balance.

In the end, Webster (2016a:57–58) is affirming of Barth's spiritual and doctrinal devotion to Christ, with one important qualification: God is the formal object of all doctrine, including Christology. Therefore, Christology cannot be allowed to terminate in the incarnation. The duty of the systematic theologian is, with Aquinas (quoted in Webster, 2016a:57–58), to demonstrate "something about a cause from its effect". When God is the "first truth" of theology, the incarnation will not be neglected, because in apprehending God we apprehend how the person of the Son shares in God's communicative goodness.

In sum, Webster's discussion of Christology surfaces certain first principles that have important second-tier effects that amplify his differences with Torrance. Webster argues from the aseity of God and the categorical difference between Creator and creation, which result in a different doctrinal locus and prominence for Christology. For Webster, Christology is a division of the doctrine of the Trinitarian God. Christology is a distributed doctrine which straddles theology first, and then economy by derivation. It is not the centre of systematic theology; that place of pre-eminence belongs to the doctrine of God. Rather, Christology is one indispensable and widely distributed part of the whole. Here is, perhaps, *the* most significant difference between Webster and Torrance. Torrance, like Barth, is much stronger in his Christological focus, but, it seems, lacks some of the balance of Barth, though this remains to be seen. Webster holds that the telos of Christ's saving work is the renewal of creation. Torrance, on the other hand, struggles to maintain the Creator–creature divide because of his strong advocacy of the atoning nature of the incarnation based on the hypostatic union. For Torrance, theosis is the telos of the incarnation. Webster promotes reasoning from effect to cause as proper to Christological knowledge. He is

therefore comfortable casting the incarnation as “instrument” and “effect”. He also operates with a working hypothesis of a strong distinction between the visible and the invisible. For Torrance, these are features and consequences of the Latin heresy, and wholly unacceptable. Webster follows Aquinas in much of this thinking, whereas Torrance considers Aquinas an advocate of the Latin heresy. It is unlikely that Aquinas would allow for Christ’s assumption of a sinful human flesh, whereas for Torrance this is a cornerstone. The differences between the two multiply, but they are all rooted in differences of method and first principle (though Torrance would be unlikely to favour that term).

Indeed, we are likely to be able to trace the differences in each man’s position on human agency in the Christian life (on participation vis-à-vis imitation) back to the same root causes. We see hints of these differences already. Webster allows for a subjective aspect in soteriology and affirms Barth’s care for human integrity, whereas these considerations are largely out of view in Torrance. But to truly understand the differences, human agency must be set in its appropriate context.

### **2.3.2.3 The Creator–creature relation**

The mixed nature of the Creator–creature relation is a topic to which Webster (2016a:115–126) gives special attention. In short, the nature of the relation between God and his creatures is real on the side of the creature, but logical on the side of God. Here, again, Webster follows Augustine and Aquinas – two Western theologians Torrance associates with the Latin heresy. Webster (2016a:116) argues that to differentiate the relation in this way is not to deny that a relation between God and his creatures exists (as is often the charge); it is to specify the nature of that relation. God’s aseity means that he cannot be considered one party in a reciprocal co-relation that somehow defines him. Moreover, it also means that the act of creation is utterly gracious and entirely for the sake of the creature.

In defining the relation between God and his creatures, Webster makes his now familiar first move: he roots creation in a prior consideration of the inner and outer works of the Triune God. After other preliminaries, he adds this all-important condition to properly articulating the Creator–creature relation (Webster, 2016a:116):

Most of all it requires the ordering of theological intelligence and spiritual appetite away from a conception of the Christian faith in which the phenomenon of God’s engagement with creatures in time is considered *id quo maius cogitari nequit* – a conception so widely shared by dogmaticians and exegetes as to be largely invisible, yet one whose possession of some of the chief elements of divine instruction is insecure.

In other words, in contemporary theology the incarnation is implicitly treated as “something than which no greater thing can be conceived”. For Webster, this underlying commitment – to which, it might be argued, Torrance was an adherent – must be eschewed if the Creator–creature relation is to be properly understood.

In building towards such an understanding, Webster (2016a:117) first gives a brief statement of his overall thesis:

The matter of Christian divinity is God and all things in relation to God. A systematic account of Christian teaching, which presents this matter by topical anatomy and sequential arrangement, has two chief divisions. It begins by considering God’s being in himself in his inner works as Father, Son and Spirit, and then, without relinquishing its first theme but enlarging it and following its scope and direction, turns to consider God’s *opera ad extra*, the first body of material (the divine processions) constituting the founding principles of the second (the divine missions). The second body of material on God’s outer works may then itself be divided into consideration of the work of nature (creation and providence) and the work of grace (election, reconciliation and the consummation of all things).

Once placed within this arrangement, the doctrine of creation serves as a bridge between God’s being in himself and God’s *opera ad extra*. It is also, along with the doctrine of the Trinity, a distributed doctrine that colours our understanding of all others. As we have seen above, Webster (2016a:18) argues that modern theology does not adhere to this arrangement. On the contrary, it favours a concentration on the economy and relative inattention to theology. The result is that creation becomes a quasi-necessary reality as an opposite partner to God in the drama of the divine–human encounter. In modern theology, the agents in the Creator–creature relation are “strangely commensurable” and the relation itself is univocal (Webster, 2016a:118). This in stark contrast to Webster’s (2016a:117) description of a “categorical difference” between the agents, and “absolute subordination” in the relation. Webster observes that this modern proclivity is especially pronounced in theologies that treat the Christ-event as irreducible – “something than which no greater thing can be conceived”. It is likely Webster would include Torrance in such a grouping.

Webster (2016a:121–125) envisages four topics in a properly ordered doctrine of creation: the Creator; the act of creation; the nature of creation; and the relation of God to creation. First, the aseity of the Creator. That God is absolutely simple and entirely other (God only; God alone) implies there is no other reality by which he can be measured.<sup>42</sup> It also implies that creation is “no

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<sup>42</sup> The importance of God’s aseity and its entailments in Webster’s thinking is suggested by the title of his two-volume compendium, *God Without Measure*.

concomitant of God” (Webster, 2016a:120). In the words of Aquinas (quoted in Webster, 2016a:120), “Creatures are not related to God as to a thing of a different genus, but as to something outside of and prior to all genera.” Second, because God has being in himself, he creates *ex nihilo*, which is to say from himself as the ground of all being. Therefore creation is qualitatively different to any contingent act of making. Third, the nature of creaturely existence is one of dependence. Creatures exist only in relation to God and are “ontologically deficient” apart from him (Webster, 2016a:121). Because God is perfectly self-sufficient, creation is utterly contingent and therefore creaturely existence is entirely gratuitous. Consequently, fourth, the relation of God to the creature is, from the side of the divine, only conceptual. The creature’s relation to God is constitutive of the creature’s being. However, God’s relation to the creature is not constitutive of God’s being. Because God’s relation to creatures is not the bare univocal reciprocal of the creature’s relation to God, it can be described as non-real, and a relation of reason. Webster (2016a:125) cites the example given by Aquinas of the relation between money and price: the latter is ordered by the former, though not vice versa. Similarly, while creation’s relation to God is real and constitutive, “The existence of creation adds nothing to God, and in its absence God would be undiminished” (Webster, 2016a:125).

The effect of this differentiated relation on the integrity of the creature is perhaps counter-intuitive (Webster, 2016a:126; emphasis added):

His work of creation is pure generosity: he makes things for their own sake, not for his. This, in turn, is the *ground of the integrity of the creature and of its proper efficacy*. Because God can be opposed by nothing – because, again, he is not a particular being acting upon others and acted upon by them – he is beyond envy of the creature, and there is in him no reluctance to bestow upon the creature *its own intrinsic substance and powers*.

In other words, far from diminishing or voiding it, God’s self-sufficiency is the basis of real human agency. This is balanced by Webster’s (2016a:126) conclusion that the proper posture of the creature is one of the “dependence and gratitude of derivation, and the repudiation of self-subsistence”. Any inclination to the contrary that sets God up as a protagonist in the human drama must be set aside by acknowledging the divine missions by which the renewal of the human nature advances. The latter is most apposite to the question at hand. This asymmetric relation between God and creatures, which is entirely gratuitous and yet real on the creaturely side, must form the backdrop to our understanding of Webster’s discussions of imitation vis-à-vis participation.

#### 2.3.2.4 Soteriology

Webster reiterates much of the aforementioned in his discussion on the doctrine of justification. He opens (Webster, 2016a:159):

The ruler and judge over all other Christian doctrines is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is not one doctrine among others; it is foundational and pervasive. To expound any Christian doctrine is to expound with varying degrees of directness the doctrine of the Trinity; to expound the doctrine of the Trinity in its full scope is to expound the entirety of Christian dogmatics.

As in the case of Christology, Webster makes this case to ward off competing doctrines, in this instance justification. All other doctrines need to be grounded in the immanent Trinity in order to avoid the modern theological tendency toward an inflated Christology or soteriology. Both of these Webster (2016a:163) attributes to the prior error of inserting a gap between God and his works, which allows the latter to be treated in isolation. Torrance also identifies this problem, though he and Webster attempt to resolve it in different ways, from different directions.

Webster's (2016a:170–173) effort to ground justification in the doctrine of God takes the following contours. First, God is righteous in himself. God's righteousness is "his perfect self-relation" and "unbroken fully realized harmony" of life and will in eternal paternity, filiation and spiration. Second, God's righteousness extends itself towards creatures in the establishment of fellowship from conception to perfection. The relation of creature to God is "wholly different" to the internal relation of God to himself. It is one of dependence and sheer gratuity, or "being in gift". Third, the shape of righteous fellowship for the creature is life under the law. Law is grounded in the righteousness of God and therefore cannot be understood outside of relation to God and God's fellowship-promoting work in history. Fourth, sin is law-breaking, and therefore unrighteousness, and therefore the breaking of fellowship with God. Sin is a rejection of both God's external but also his internal righteousness. Fifth, God rescues the sinner by interposing himself between the creature and the creature's unrighteousness. The unrighteousness of the creature is powerless to undermine the eternal purpose of the Father. The filial relation of the Son to the Father is the basis and power of the Son's temporal mission and his restoration of creaturely fellowship with the Father. The Holy Spirit as Lord, the giver of life, seals the fellowship purposed by the Father and won by the son in the creature. Justification is a work of the Father, Son and Spirit grounded in their internal relations. Finally, it follows that the goal of the Son's mission is the restoration of righteous fellowship between God and his creatures. This is achieved by the Son in "what he does, as the one he is". In this, Christ acts in our place, for our sakes. He restores the righteous fellowship with God "from the creaturely side". We participate in Christ's righteousness in the Spirit. The righteousness he offers us is alien, but it is not fictional since it is established and

upheld by God (Father, Son and Spirit), which is always and necessarily the nature of creaturely being.

Much of Webster's sketch of justification would resonate deeply with Torrance. However, there are serious differences, which Webster (2016a:174; emphasis original) himself highlights, and criticisms, which he anticipates:

Much more could and should be said. In particular, the foregoing sketch of the setting of justification in the history of righteous fellowship between the triune God and his creatures would need to be expanded in conversation with a quite different Trinitarian model of justification, one which lays emphasis upon the participation of the justified in the triune life or upon *theosis*. The task would be to show that the covenantal soteriology presupposed in the foregoing is not, as it is sometimes charged to be, an extrinsicist repudiation of the ontological dimensions of God's relation with creatures, or (Ockhamist? Ritschlian?) retraction of the scope of that relation to mere *Tatgemeinschaft*. Rather, it is an attempt to give expression to the ontological entailments of God's justifying work without falling into the trap of making participation into the only way of conceiving of the metaphysics of creaturely being in relation to God. If there is a drastically one-dimensional theology of imputed righteousness, there is a no less one-dimensional theology of *koinonia*, and neither can serve as the exclusive basis for an account of how the righteous God makes creatures righteous. What is required is a metaphysics in which relation to God is conceived neither in terms of a preconceived notion of ontological union, nor in terms of an abstract opposition between divine and creaturely being, but in accordance with the canon's recital of the differentiated fellowship of the perfect triune life-giver and the creatures of his mercy.

Webster rejects a relation of God to creatures cast solely in terms of participation, but he does so without retreating into a purely forensic conception of that relation. Instead, he posits a biblical account of variegated relation between God and his creatures.

### **2.3.2.5 Ecclesiology**

Webster (2016a:177) opens his exposition of the doctrine of the church with his standard theological move, which is to present any doctrine, in this case ecclesiology, as a function of the doctrine of God. Webster deems this a necessary and suggestive precursor to answering the question which he then poses: "What kind of society is the church?"

His preliminary answer is that ecclesiology comprises a proximate and a principal *res*. As a proximate *res* the church is a human society, but as a principal *res* it is a temporal procession suspended from the eternal processions within the being of God. Webster (2016a:178) notes that embedding our conception of the church in the being of God in this way draws the accusation of idealism. He counters that the accusation itself conceals a hidden conviction that the

sociohistorical (as opposed to the divine-eternal) is the real – a conviction that confuses the proximate *res* of ecclesiology for the principal *res*. And so, argues Webster (2016a:178–179), in a professed defence of non-competition between divine and human agency, those who lay the charge of idealism end up with an elision of the agency of God into the agency of the church. This, of course, is the mirror image of the error of which Torrance is sometimes accused.

Webster (2016a:179) asks why these proposals have gained such traction in contemporary theology. His answer is, in the first place, “the modern turn to history” and, in the second, the appeal to doctrines, such as the incarnation, in isolation of the broader counsel of God. In short, the economy has become the principal *res* in ecclesiology.

Webster’s counter-proposal is that we start from the premise that God and his agency are *the real*. Time and society (and therefore the church) are derivative realities. Webster (2016a:179) quotes Aquinas in labelling the church a society whose “essence is not its *esse*”. It is worth repeating that Torrance would likely judge this position as a manifestation of the Latin heresy typical of Western theologians like Aquinas, in which sensible (creaturely) and intelligible (eternal) realities are split apart. He would likely propose the incarnation as a remedy, by which divine and creaturely realities coalesce as equally real. Clearly for Webster this would be to ignore or compromise the aseity of God and the differentiated relation God has with his creatures.

Indeed, Webster (2016a:180) states his own position thus: “ecclesiology and ecclesial action are creaturely realities to be set under the metaphysics of grace”. Webster (2016a:180n10) explicitly juxtaposes his position with that of D.W. Hardy. Hardy’s position is very much akin to that of Torrance. Hardy’s critique is of a Western theology that allows for only ‘extrinsic and occasional’ relations between God and the church, to the exclusion of any intrinsic relation. Hardy’s solution, like that of Torrance, is to propose a ‘dynamic unity’ and ‘ongoing relation’ between God and the church based on God’s self-structuring, which in turn enables the church to structure its own life. ‘Self-structuring’ implies the missions of the Son and the Spirit, and therefore the incarnation plays a central role. Webster’s critique of Hardy could, no doubt, be extended to Torrance: the immanent life of God is remote in favour of a strong emphasis on the economy; the connection between the two is too thin. Once again, he affirms that the agency of the church makes sense only when it is embedded in the immanent life and agency of God.

Webster (2016a:181) admits that he is more open to the charge of extrinsicism (which follows on from the abovementioned charge of idealism) than are those who build their ecclesiology on the

principal of *totus Christus*.<sup>43</sup> He argues that any such extrinsicism is merely apparent, since it is, in fact, an attempt to take seriously the differentiated relation between God and creation, especially the church.

To do this requires, according to Webster, Trinitarian deduction<sup>44</sup> such that the doctrine of God is shown to be directly at work on the doctrine of the church, and the doctrine of the church is shown to be necessary to the full scope of the doctrines of God and creation.

And so Webster (2016a:182) proceeds with his Trinitarian deduction. The Trinitarian God is a self-moved movement. This is not a movement from lesser to greater, but is throughout a movement in perfect fullness and repose. The form of this movement is in the eternal processions of paternity, filiation and spiration. From the abundance of God's goodness, this movement overflows into creative love which manifests in a creative reality that has its own identity and agency, but only at the hands of God. We can trace the history of creaturely reality in covenant fellowship that finally issues in the church.

Thus, in the first place, it is God the Father who purposes the existence of the church by adoption, under the covenant of grace (Webster, 2016a:183).

In the second place, the church exists because of the person and work of God the Son. Webster (2016a:184) argues that when the focus in this area narrows onto the earthly incarnate career of the Son, then both Christology and ecclesiology are distorted, and the overall question narrows to "What kind of continuity is there between the incarnate Son and the church?" Avoiding this distortion involves focussing on the Son in his eternal deity, in his temporal mission, and in his exalted status. Otherwise, the appropriate relation between the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of the church is reversed.

Beginning with the Son in his eternal deity, Webster (2016a:184) asserts that "'Son' and 'incarnate Son' are not wholly co-incident realities". Moreover, "*Logos* and *sarx* are asymmetrical". In other words, the identity and agency of the Son are not limited to, or exhausted by, the incarnation. There is an antecedent freedom in the eternal Son that must be accounted for. In language apposite to the purpose of this study, Webster (2016a:185) states that full account of the eternal deity of the Son is elemental to ecclesiology because it secures "the right sort of externality in Christ's relation to the church: not... a gulf between God and creatures... but rather the

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<sup>43</sup> Whether Torrance falls into this category is open to debate. At the very least he is closer to *totus Christus* than is Webster.

<sup>44</sup> It seems Torrance would already object at this opening statement of methodology, since he opposes theology that amounts to the organisation of logico-causal systems.

irreversible relation-in-distinction between uncreated and created". And yet, when he considers the Son in his temporal mission, Webster is close to using the language of participation in declaring the incarnate Son, as he reconciles and recapitulates, to be "the ontological condition of the church". Finally, the Son in his exalted state is elemental to ecclesiology because it reaffirms his external relation to the church without compromising the doctrine of union with Christ. To that end, appropriate distinction in the relation is muted or lost in the *totus Christus* conception because of its narrow concentration on the head–body metaphor. Where allowance is made for other biblical metaphors of origination, primogeniture, and pre-eminence, a relation of intimate fellowship with clearly distinct identity emerges to preserve a credible conception of union with Christ (Webster, 2016a:186–187).

In the third place, the church exists because the Holy Spirit is the Lord who gives life. The Holy Spirit is the divine agent of creaturely agency and perfection (Webster, 2016a:187).

In sum, God (Father, Son and Spirit) is a self-moved movement. In answering the question 'What kind of society is the church?' the first point Webster (2016a:188) makes is that the church is a moved movement. He adds that the biblical teaching is that the motions of God and creature are not inversely proportional, as in a zero-sum game. They are directly proportional, so that when we speak of the identity and agency of the church, we must use the language of divine movement. The church does not self-make or self-realise; it follows its God-given nature. The history of sin is the history of the covenant people refusing to recognise that they have "life *ab extra*" (Webster, 2016a:190).<sup>45</sup> In the exercise of divine wisdom and providence, God is the "exemplary, efficient and final cause" of the church and its action (Webster, 2016a:188–189). Of course, God as "exemplary cause" opens the way for Webster to allow for imitation, but not an imitation conceived without God as efficient and final cause. Divine providence is theme that requires further exploration, which it will be given below.

The second answer Webster (2016a:189) gives, is that the church is "signitive" (to use Torrance's term) – the being and agency of the church points beyond itself to the being and agency of the Triune God. Where Torrance (e.g., 1955:92–94) makes this point, he largely limits that which is signified to the Second Person of the Trinity.

The final answer Webster (2016a:189) gives is that the church is obscure, in the sense that it does not show its relation to God without ambiguity and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>45</sup> Torrance describes this covenantal sin as the reversal of the primacy of the Mosaic priesthood over its Aaronic counterpart.

He then goes on to offer three examples of how the relation between God and the church finds temporal expression (Webster, 2016a:190–193). In assembly, the church is “a moved movement of congregation” that signifies the assembly immanent in God himself. In hearing and proclaiming Scripture, the church is a moved movement of the Word signifying the God who communicates himself. Scripture is a clear example of the action of God mediated through the church. In order, the church is a moved movement of common life, signifying the perfect fellowship within the being of God. It is thus the theatre of mortification of sin, where creaturely fellowship and fellowship with God are sanctified and move towards their perfection.

Webster (2016a:193) concludes with this definition of church and the church’s relation to its God:

The church is not simply social nature but created and fallen social nature recreated by the saving missions of the Son of God and the Holy Spirit and so reconciled to God and on the way to its perfection... The church is a society which moves itself as it is moved by God.

In conclusion, it seems that Torrance and Webster, both contemporary British theologians and students of Barth, were responding to the modern theological tendency to drive a wedge between God and his works. For Torrance, the solution was strong identity in the hypostatic union. For Webster, the solution was strong distinction in a differentiated relation between God and his creatures. We turn now to explore how Webster’s solution impacts his understanding of the relation between divine and human agency in the Christian life, in terms of imitation.

### **2.3.3 Webster: preliminaries to understanding imitation**

Before proceeding to imitation specifically, some important preliminary comments must be made. Webster (e.g., 2016b:1–27) is convinced that act follows being, and that moral theology is an entailment of theology proper – not as an addendum but as a necessary amplification. To know God and all things relative to God means to know God as Creator of creatures, and in particular as the Creator of human beings. Because God created human agents as moral agents, regenerate intelligence must trace the course of our knowledge of God all the way through to practical human responses in different circumstances without ever departing from its principal object: God in his being and works. Put otherwise, what we do is governed by who we are, is governed by the God who made us. Therefore, “there is a material order to dogmatic-moral and practical-ethical theology, in which inquiry into nature precedes attention to circumstances” (Webster, 2016b:3).

Webster (2016b:10) makes strong statements on the priority of being in Christ as the basis of ethics.<sup>46</sup>

Jesus Christ establishes and governs the order of moral being and the order of moral knowing; he is the ontological and noetic foundation of good human conduct.

However, in making such statements, Webster always articulates a participation that vivifies rather than nullifies creaturely moral agency (e.g., Webster, 2016b:9, 14):

All this serves to indicate in an initial way that Jesus Christ presides over a moral economy; knowledge of him is in this sense practical. To apprehend his being is to feel the forward pressure of the 'therefore' towards modes of action which are impressed by his own: 'as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive'...

Moral ontology concerns the creature's appointment to be a certain kind of being. The creature being moved in order to engage in a certain movement.

This is the ground and the necessary context, if we are to understand him correctly, of Webster's thinking on imitation.

#### **2.3.4 Webster: his critique of mere participation and his defence of imitation**

In approaching the topic of imitation, Webster (1986b:95) states his overarching intention thus:

In particular I am concerned to explore an aspect of the relationship of the grace of God to human ethical activity; I want to consider the possibility of combining an emphasis on the prevenient reality of Jesus Christ as the agent of our salvation with a proper sense that human persons are themselves agents whose characters are realised in their acts. If Christians are what they are by virtue of their participation in the benefits of God's saving acts in Christ, then what room is left for human ethical activity in our account of what makes a person into the person he or she is?

The difficulty, as Webster sees it (suggested by the final question in the quote above), is the tension in the New Testament between teaching on the extraneous and gratuitous origins of human agency, and the imperatives that appear to address a subjective agency in man. In his view, the solution to this problem is to be found in the New Testament teaching on the imitation of Christ (Webster, 1986b:96).

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<sup>46</sup> It is noteworthy that in drawing out the relation between metaphysics and ethics, Webster (2016b:12ff) is critical of Bonhoeffer's understanding, whereas Torrance is highly affirming of Bonhoeffer's understanding.

Webster (1986b:97–103) offers a number of reasons why this solution has been neglected. By his own admission, imitation has not been a major theme in either theology or ethics because of the paucity of the theme in the New Testament itself. Moreover, Protestant tradition has hesitated to expound the theme because of an anxiety that it might undermine the unique sufficiency of the person and work of Christ. Instead, biblical studies in the Gospels and Paul have tended to stress discipleship as participation in the finished work of Christ. The language of imitation has been criticised for promoting a focus on human agency, rather than the agency of God, and for presenting Christ as a mere exemplar, such that the Christian extends Christ's work and any real distinction falls away. Webster (1986a:314) considers the origin of this resistance to imitation:

... these objections in their different ways articulate a tradition of theological judgement concerned above all to defend a fully 'realist' or 'objective' conception of Christ's work, and of that work as finished.

In full view of these reservations, Webster (1986b:103) advocates for a cautious appropriation of biblical imitation as an avenue by which to approach "the problem of human historical action". His first contention is that the Christians' relation to the objective ground of their salvation does not nullify subjective moral agency. Nor does a rejection of the strategy of moral self-justification imply divine disinterest in the moral life of Christians. Webster (1986b:104) extrapolates:

If this is so, then any account of 'life in Christ' will be deficient if it does not seek to describe the ways in which human beings act in response to obligation, and how their actions are intrinsic to what we understand of their character as persons. For any talk about human obligation remains very abstract and formal if it does not actually specify the shape that human life takes in entering into God's revealed purpose.

Yet this is precisely what Webster finds missing from prominent Protestant accounts of life in Christ. So strong is the emphasis on divine agency, in Berkouwer, for instance, that the Pauline imperative reduces to "Believe!" In accounts such as this, subjective human agency elides into the sole agency of Christ, Christians are detached from their works, and the notion of moral responsibility dissolves.<sup>47</sup> Imitation, on the other hand, offers shape and content to a life in Christ (Webster, 1986b:105). Indeed, imitation is intrinsic to conformity to and participation in Christ, which is how the indicative and the imperative hold together (Verhey quoted in Webster, 1986b:106):

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<sup>47</sup> The criticism Webster directs to Berkouwer here he would likely also direct to Torrance, given the similarity of their accounts at this point, and his thinly veiled reference to Torrance later in this essay.

Participation in Christ's cross and resurrection (the important priority of the indicative) and anticipation of the new age of God's unchallenged sovereignty (the important finality of the indicative) are constituted here and now by obedience to God's will (the imperative).

Webster (1986b:106–109) turns to an exegesis of Philippians 2:5–11 to validate and elaborate these contentions. He uses Käsemann's critical analysis as a foil. Käsemann viewed the hymn as celebrating the event of salvation. In that context, Käsemann argues that the ἐν Χριστῷ in verse 5 expresses participation in the domain of Christ, rather than imitation of the attitude of Christ (Webster, 1986b:107). Käsemann's critics raise three kinds of objections. Firstly, his reading is rooted in a prior rejection of any intrinsic connection between Christology and human morality. It therefore presents a strong separation of the indicative and the imperative that is uncharacteristic of Paul. Second, Käsemann's exclusive focus on the exalted lordship of Christ makes the temporal history of Jesus, as well as the temporal histories of his followers, somewhat redundant. Third, Käsemann's reading betrays an over-realised eschatology that acknowledges no residue of the old age.

On this basis, Webster rejects Käsemann's interpretation and posits his own, which casts the agency of Christ as a pattern for Christian agency, rather than as a substitute. He argues that Philippians 2 not only exhorts obedient action, but provides shape to that action by referencing the earthly life of Jesus. In verse 5 and verse 10, Paul uses the earthly name "Jesus", which Webster (1986b:110) views as a signal of the importance of Jesus' observable temporal history to the paraenesis of chapter 2. Jesus Christ is both exalted Lord to be worshipped and earthly master to be followed.

Webster returns to consider why these conclusions are often ignored or rejected within Protestant circles. The proximate reason is the conviction that "Christology is not about the life Jesus lived" (Webster, 1986b:110). An almost exclusive focus on the exalted lordship of Christ evacuates his earthly history of significance and leaves the appropriate Christian response unspecified. While Torrance cannot be associated with this conviction, Webster (1986b:111; emphasis added) appears to implicate him in what he views as the ultimate reason for the Protestant disregard of imitation:

But behind this may lie a further dogma, characteristic of some strands of Protestantism, in which justification virtually cancels out sanctification, Christology swallows ecclesiology, and *soteriology leaves ethics in suspension*.

Torrance's call for a *soteriological suspension of ethics* is almost certainly in view here. His strongly participationist conception of the Christian life built on higher-order doctrines and methods precludes the kind of use of imitation which Webster (1986b:111) is calling for:

If on the other hand, the argument which I have tried to phrase has any validity, then precisely because Philippians 2:5–11 is the recital of the saving history of Jesus Christ, it is equally an exhortation to the Christian life as a life moulded by the same history.

... None of this is to say that Christ is merely an exemplar or that the salvific acts of the *Κύριος* are in principle repeatable in Christians. It is merely to affirm that, in this particular context, Paul understands the gospel of Christ's saving deeds as calling forth human morality and conduct. In this sense, Christ's action is more than vicarious: it is also evocative, or perhaps better, provocative, in that it constitutes a summons to a properly dependent mimesis.

The language here echoes Webster's wider theological writings, in which he conceives of divine agency and human agency not as inversely proportional, but as directly proportional, and therefore no less a relation of grace. He (Webster, 1986b:112–114) draws similar conclusions from his exposition of the theme of baptism, which in the first place testifies to the unique agency of Christ but then also summons the baptisand to moral agency (e.g., Rom. 6:3–11 followed by vv. 12–14).

On the basis of the foregoing exegesis, Webster (1986b:114–120) offers some concluding systematic reflections. Because the New Testament roots imitation in conformity to and participation in Christ, it precludes two profound errors in our understanding of the relation of the agency of Christ and Christian agency. "A properly dependent mimesis" will not allow for either separation or identity in that relation (Webster, 1986b:114). Instead, biblical imitation promotes an understanding of the relation between the agency of Christ and his people as "correspondence" or "analogy".<sup>48</sup> These terms preserve both the mutuality and the distinction in that relation such that human agency is neither "autonomous nor otiose" (Webster, 1986b:115). The life of Jesus Christ first enables and then evokes human correspondence. He is the cause whose effects reverberate in human histories (Webster, 1986b:116).

Webster (1986b:117–118) cautions against overblown accounts of imitation that, like overblown accounts of participation, end in identity of the agency of Christ and the Christian. He warns against an imitation that echoes Torrance's description of Platonic imitation (Webster, 2016b:114):

It may elide the distinction between Christ and the Christian, envisaging Christ as merely the first in a series, as a dispenser of moral instruction, as a lawgiver or a model for emulation. It may detach Christian moral and ascetical practices from their ground in Christ's office as redeemer, and

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<sup>48</sup> Compare with Torrance's understanding of the relation as "signitive".

may fail to grasp the drastic redrawing of the believers' relation to their moral lives which redemption entails.

Identity between Christ and the Christian, whether approached from the side of imitation or participation, "render[s] moral history superfluous" (Webster, 2016b:22). The former elides the agency of Christ into that of the Christian; the latter elides the agency of the Christian into Christ. In reaffirming a balanced doctrine of imitation, Webster (1986b:119) questions the *raison d'être* of the four Gospels. He contends that the subjective history of Christ's life in the Gospels forms the basis and pattern of our subjective histories. Webster (1986b:120) concludes his account of imitation with a strong statement of the priority of participation.

It is notable, and perhaps surprising, that one who so ardently defends the aseity and uniqueness of God – Father, Son and Spirit – and the gratuity of his relations with his creation would advocate for human agency in the imitation of Christ. It seems he can do so only in light of the differentiated relation that he proposes between God and man. A mixed relation preserving an ontological distinction gives Webster confidence to explore biblical imitation without fear that it will undermine the uniqueness of Christ or the grace of God. The theological setting Webster suggests allows for a derivative human agency moved by God to move itself towards conformity with Christ. For all they have in common, aspects of Webster's presuppositional matrix, aspects of his theology in general, and his specific position on imitation set him apart from Torrance.

## **2.4 Chapter summary and conclusion**

The goal of this chapter was to describe how agency in participation and imitation functions and relates in the theology of Thomas Torrance and a representative critic, John Webster. It is by now clear that his methods, influences and presuppositions predispose Torrance toward participation and away from imitation, and affect his characterisation of Christian agency accordingly. Following Athanasius and Polanyi in their critical realism, Torrance is inclined from the outset toward participation in the objective person of Christ, over against the subjective agency implied in certain versions of imitation. This tendency is reinforced by his antipathy for the dualisms of the "Latin heresy" and his push for integration – both carried over from Athanasius and Barth. Following the Greek fathers, for Torrance the Christian life has its telos in eschatological participation, or theosis.

Torrance's methodological preferences and presuppositions are at once stimulated and satisfied by the incarnation. The incarnation achieves the integration he is seeking in the unity of divine being and agency, God and man, revelation and reconciliation, Giver and gift. The incarnation also reveals God in the nexus of the relations between Father, Son and Spirit; and reveals an

atonement which is ontological in nature. It thus meets the criteria of critical realism and *κατὰ φύσιν*. The incarnation presents Christ the mediator not only in a movement of God to man, but also in a movement of man to God. For all of these reasons, the centrality of the incarnation to the theology of Torrance positions him to think of the human response and Christian agency in terms of participation, and to reject imitation, especially in its Platonic forms.

We must also understand Torrance's favouring of participation over against imitation in the context of his polemic against human response as subjective existential decision advocated by the likes of Bultmann. The hegemony of Bultmann's theories within Protestantism would no doubt have sharpened Torrance's rhetoric. It may have moved him to adopt somewhat overblown language, like that deployed in his call for a "soteriological suspension of ethics". While Torrance borrowed the phrase from the arch-existentialist Kierkegaard, he understood the central idea of unmediated relation to the absolute not in terms of existential decision, but in terms of participation in the objective reality of Christ. That is perhaps why he could offer Bonhoeffer the conspirator as an exemplar of someone who understood the full implications of participation in Christ for human agency. The parallels with the filicidal Abraham are outlined above.

For Torrance, participation is both the means and the end of the Christian response. He rejects imitation, particularly in its Platonic guise as an independent reproduction of the original, because it implies an independent and subjective human agency.

Webster and Torrance are both twentieth-century British protestant theologians who came under the influence of Karl Barth. Yet, for all their common ground, Webster takes a different stance to Torrance in many key areas, and therefore a cursory study of Webster places Torrance in stark relief.

In his method, Webster advocates causal knowledge and Trinitarian deduction. Over against Torrance's aversion to logico-causal system-building, he is a self-proclaimed systematic theologian. Where Torrance applies a strongly objective critical realism to epistemology, soteriology and ethics, Webster argues for the importance of the subjective pole within a differentiated objective–subjective interaction. Torrance views the tendency of modern theology to drive a wedge between God and his works as having its historical roots in Western theology. In response, as a remedy to the dualisms multiplied by the Latin heresy, his theological instinct is towards integration. Webster believes that the structural defects that entered medieval Western theology can be repaired, and the dualisms overcome. His instinct, in pursuit of that end, is towards distinction in relation. This instinct moves Webster towards a derivative imitation embedded in, and issuing from, a participation that establishes and provokes subjective human

agency. The end of such a process is creaturely renewal in fellowship with God rather than theosis, which does not maintain identity distinction as sharply.

As to the incarnation, Webster does not afford it the place of pre-eminence that Torrance does. He reserves that place for the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The incarnation serves to elucidate the doctrine of the Trinity. As such, the incarnation, for all its importance, is an instrumental effect. Moreover, the relation between God and his people is differentiated: real and constitutive on the side of the creature, but logical and non-constitutive on the side of God. This double determination – the relative nature of the economy and the incarnation, as well as the differentiated nature of the relation between God and his creatures – inclines Webster both away from the strongly participationist view that Torrance advocates, and towards an account that includes a qualified human agency. For the same reason, Webster rejects a soteriological suspension of ethics. Instead, he proposes a union with Christ that retains distinction of identity, and imitation that emerges from such a union and gives shape to the Christian life. Unlike Torrance, he is critical of Bonhoeffer in this area.

Contra Torrance, Webster conceives of a participation that would be incomplete without imitation giving it shape, and an account of human agency in the process of Christian transformation towards creaturely renewal in fellowship with God.

Both men are aware of criticism from the other side, but here we give Torrance (1992a:xii; emphasis original) the last word:

Some people evidently feel that the stress I have laid upon unconditional grace undermines the integrity of the response we are called to make in repentance for sin and in acceptance of Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour. Part of the problem here is that unconditional grace is too costly, for it calls in question all that we are and do, so that even in our repenting and believing we cannot rely upon our own response but only upon the response Christ has offered to the Father in our place and on our behalf. How the 'I' of the human believer and the 'I' of Christ are related to one another, expressed for example in the Pauline statement, 'I, yet not I but Christ', is a miracle of the Spirit, and is ultimately as inexplicable as the miracle of the Virgin Birth of Jesus which for me is the unique God-given pattern of unconditional grace. All through the incarnate life and activity of the Lord Jesus we are shown that *'all of grace' does not mean 'nothing of man'*, but precisely the opposite: all of grace means all of man, for the fullness of grace creatively includes the fullness and completeness of our human response in the equation. But this is not something that can be understood logically, for logically 'all of grace' would mean 'nothing of man', which may tempt people to apportion the role of Christ and of the believer by arguing for 'something of grace' and 'something of man', something done for me by Christ and something I do for myself. All of grace means all of man!

To properly evaluate Torrance's position (and an alternative in Webster) requires a closer examination of his sources. To that we now turn.

## CHAPTER 3: PARTICIPATION, IMITATION AND AGENCY IN TORRANCE'S SOURCES

### 3.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to determine how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the sources to which Torrance appeals, in order to assess the validity of his appeal. I have restricted this investigation accordingly. This chapter deals with participation and imitation in Plato, Athanasius and some of the other Greek fathers, as well as in Calvin, Kierkegaard, Barth and Bonhoeffer. Although Torrance is an advocate of *participation* in understanding Christian agency, this chapter tends to focus on how his sources deal with *imitation*, since that is likely to be the most fruitful area of inquiry. Discovering dissonance between Torrance and his sources will prompt more questions and avenues of investigation than would simply noting agreement. It will move us to a deeper understanding of Torrance himself.

### 3.2 Platonic imitation

To begin with it is necessary to review, as closely as possible, how Torrance understood Platonic mimesis, and why he rejected it.

To that end, it is worth revisiting two of Torrance's statements on the topic:

That is not to say that the rationality of creatures, things or souls, is an uncreated participation in the transcendent Rationality of God, or even a mimesis of that Rationality in some sort of Platonic *μέθεξις* for it is a participation only by God's grace... (Torrance, 1975:219).

No transubstantiation or fusion is involved. The relation is truly sacramental and eschatological... it points beyond itself... it will pass away... it is not a translation into terms of space and time of a heavenly order... [it] must not be understood as if it were within history a replica of an eternal and celestial reality. (Torrance, 1955:97).

In the first statement, Torrance is describing the rational aspect of the relation between human being and agency and divine being and agency. In so doing, he groups "uncreated participation", "mimesis" and "Platonic *μέθεξις*" together as worthy of rejection. Sproul (2000:38; emphasis mine), in his commentary on Plato, also groups Platonic participation and imitation together in a manner that suggests the concepts are somewhat interchangeable:

Something is good only insofar as it *participates in* or *imitates* the perfect idea of the good, and this ideal was Plato's god.

As a means of describing the relation between human being and agency and divine being and agency, Torrance rejects both participation and imitation in their Platonic guise. Instead, he advocates participation by the grace of God in Christ. Torrance sets Platonic imitation and “uncreated participation” over against participation by grace.<sup>49</sup>

For Torrance (1975:218–219) this contrast is an important part of the contribution made by Athanasius as he expounded the Creator–creature relation. The Greek father was navigating between Aristotle and the Stoics, with their divine ultra-immanence, on the one hand, and Plato, with his divine ultra-transcendence and the associated dualisms, on the other. He did so by charting a third, biblical way: participation by grace.

Torrance follows Athanasius and advocates participation by grace over against Platonic imitation. This suggests that he understands Platonic imitation as something approaching participation apart from grace, and therefore apart from Christ – actualised independently from the creaturely side. Thus, for Torrance, Platonic imitation is in fact a false attempt at participation rather than its opposite. Torrance is not arguing for participation over and against imitation per se. Rather, he understands Platonic imitation as a type of counterfeit participation that undermines true participation by grace. In participation by grace, participation is achieved by divine agency, or ‘from the top down’. In Platonic imitation (as per Torrance), participation is attempted by human agency, or ‘from bottom up’.

We see something similar in the second statement above. There Torrance is describing the relation between human being and agency in the earthly priesthood, and divine being and agency in Christ’s heavenly priesthood. Everything he says in the negative, everything he rejects as not of the nature of the true relation, concords with his description of Platonic imitation (cf. Torrance, 1955:93). In other words, Platonic imitation involves transubstantiation or fusion of divine and creaturely realities (Torrance, 1955:97). It is “a translation into terms of space and time of a heavenly order” (ibid.). Platonic imitation should be “understood as if it were within history a replica of an eternal and celestial reality” (ibid.). Indeed, elsewhere, in describing the Eastern Orthodox understanding of Christian art, Torrance (1955:93–94) denounces Platonic imitation as “a hypostatic transcription or *μίμησις* of the heavenly reality, claiming veneration on earth”.

In conclusion, it seems that Torrance understands Platonic imitation as an independent human capacity to participate in divine reality apart from grace. Applied to Christian ethics, this would imply a merely human attempt to reproduce the righteousness of Christ in the Christian life. For

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<sup>49</sup> Participation by grace is Torrance’s short hand for participation in the divine fellowship by the self-giving of God in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, where the Giver and the gift are integrated (see the glossary of key technical terms above).

Torrance, no such capacity exists, and any attempt to actualise it would achieve nothing more than extrinsic conformity, which he considers anathema.

The immediate and obvious question is whether Torrance's conception of Platonic imitation is a fair reading of Plato. That is a difficult question to answer, since Plato's usage of the imitation word group is complex. He uses the word group in relation to aesthetics, ethics and cosmology, but those discussions are not discreet. His treatment of imitation in aesthetics carries over into ethics, and both are informed by his usage of imitation in cosmology (Michaelis, 1967:660), though the nature and extent of that influence are a matter of debate. To begin to explore this complexity, we will first consider Plato's usage of the imitation word group in aesthetics and ethics, and then in cosmology.

### **3.2.1 Platonic imitation in aesthetics and ethics**

According to Pappas (2017), there are three elements which constitute what might (anachronistically) be called Plato's aesthetics: beauty, imitation and inspiration. Beauty is real and therefore analogous to Plato's concept of *form*. Beauty approximates the good, and therefore possesses a status above other forms. In the *Republic*, Plato advocates cultivating an appetite for beauty amongst the guardians, since this will lead them into virtue (Pappas, 2017). Inspiration is, simply put, divine influence on the poet or artist. For the transmission of truth, inspiration implies that the agency of the gods is inversely proportional to that of the human agent (Pappas, 2017).

Pappas (2017) acknowledges that imitation is a more ambiguous concept in Plato's writings than is beauty or inspiration. Plato deals with imitation most directly in books III and X of the *Republic*. The source of the ambiguity (and much scholarly controversy) is how the two books relate to each other on this topic. Kaftański (2016:6) describes the ambiguity and the ensuing controversy as follows:

Some scholars believe that Plato gives a positive overview of imitation in the third book of the *Republic*, but the tenth book of that work contradicts that understanding. According to this and other similar perspectives, the ultimate view of imitation in Plato is either self-contradictory or ultimately negative. Another perspective on Plato's rendering of imitation is based on a different reading of the relation between the books. According to this interpretation, 'Book III' of the *Republic* presents both positive and negative types of imitation and 'Book X' concentrates predominantly on criticism of the negative approach to imitation. The conclusive role of the tenth book is to emphasize the philosopher's criticism of the 'hazardous' type of imitation. Therefore, the internal conflict regarding Plato's rendering of imitation is to a certain extent illusory.

Pappas (2017; cf. Michaelis, 1967:660) adopts the first approach and argues that, while there is some ambiguity, Plato himself has a largely pejorative view of imitation. His argument runs as

follows. In the *Republic*, imitation is defined in the context of play-acting as impersonation or copy-making. The weakness of imitation is that it trades in illusion and appearance rather than reality. Indeed, a human agent produces a *particular* from her imperfect vision of the *form*. She copies the imperfect particular imperfectly. Thus imitation is twice removed from reality. It is a compound problem and a double failure. Moreover, since it appeals not to reason but to the lesser elements within the soul, artistic imitation disturbs the soul's balance and ends in its corruption. According to Pappas (2017), Plato goes further to argue that, given its focus on appearances, imitation is a kind of blasphemous idolatry. Both book III and book X conclude that imitation should be banned from the city, since it has the potential to corrupt the young guardians. While his discussion centres on the dramatic and poetic arts (aesthetics), in both books Plato extends the application of his thinking on imitation to ethics (Pappas, 2017; cf. Michaelis, 1967:660).

Pappas (2017) allows that book III appears to offer an exception to this damning assessment, where imitation is of a virtuous and thoughtful character. However, in book X Plato all but eliminates that reprieve by arguing that such an anomaly does not exist. Plato's later writings appear to open the idea of development in Plato's thought toward a more favourable understanding of imitation. Pappas (2017), however, rejects the idea by asserting that Plato's treatment of imitation in his later writings is at best tangential and fleeting, and therefore cannot undermine the weight of his direct treatments of the subject in the *Republic*. Pappas (2017) concludes as follows:

Mimêsis fails in two ways. 1) It originates in appearance rather than in reality, so that judged on its own terms the product of imitation has an ignoble pedigree (*Republic* 603b). 2) The imitative arts positively direct a soul toward appearances, away from proper objects of inquiry... an imitation keeps your eyes on the copy alone. Imitation has a base cause and baser effects.

Pappas (2017) concedes only one redeeming possibility – the concept of inspiration. In Plato's writings, the arch-imitator, the poet, can, only under the divine influence of inspiration, produce what is beautiful and true. Moreover, poetry in praise of the gods is the one poetic form Plato affirms (Pappas, 2017):

Plato recognizes a salutary function that imitations sometimes have, even the function of drawing the mind toward knowledge. But he offers no more than hints about positive mimêsis. There is no account of sound imitation that would counterweigh the attacks in the *Republic*. In any case this is a constructive turn that never seems to be made available to poems or paintings. If good imitation does exist, its home is not among the arts. Still the idea invites a worthwhile question: Is there anything human beings can produce that would function oppositely to mimetic poetry? Inspiration is the most promising possibility.

While Pappas adopts the first of the two scholarly readings of Platonic imitation outlined above, Kaftański (2016:6) follows Tate's classic exposition of the second reading. On Tate's understanding, in book III Plato is presenting two types of imitation – a positive type and a negative type. Plato then goes on in book X to criticise the negative type. This negative type involves the mimicking of others. Plato's positive imitation is an imitation of an ideal self, or "a virtuous striving to become one's self" (Kaftański, 2016:6). The way Pappas dismisses Plato's later writings as anomalous and struggles to overcome the internal tension in the *Republic* argues in favour of this second reading of imitation in Plato's ethics. We turn now to consider Plato's cosmology.

### 3.2.2 Platonic imitation in cosmology

Plato's writings in *Timaeus* give us some insight into his cosmology. *Timaeus* is more important for its influence, especially on Neoplatonism, than for its philosophical relevance (Russell, 2004:142), not to mention its relevance on the topic of imitation. Nevertheless, it may have been important to Torrance because it presents a dualistic framework in which created things are copies of the eternal fitted for time. And so (Plato quoted in Russell, 2004:143):

When the father and creator saw the creature which he had made moving and living, the created image of the eternal gods, he rejoiced, and in his joy determined to make the copy still more like the original; and as this was eternal, he sought to make the universe eternal, so far as might be. Now the nature of the ideal being was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fullness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity; and this image we call time.

Thus, in *Timaeus*, Plato's view of the created world is "a copy of an eternal archetype" (Russell, 2004:147) wherein "time imitates eternity" (Michaelis, 1967:661). Human imitation of the higher world of ideas is by "analogy" or "imperfect correspondence, their original συγγένεια [kinship] presupposed" (Michaelis, 1967:661). It is not by "an act of free decision" but by the "development of an existing disposition" (ibid.). The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Michaelis, 1967:661) concludes:

... the more strongly the mimesis concept is tied to the cosmological schema of original and copy, the less prominent is the thought, sustained by ethical responsibility, of the obedient following of a model.

The link between cosmology and ethics in Plato's concept of imitation is not to be denied, but the nature and strength of that link is an open question (Michaelis, 1967:661–662).

### 3.2.3 Platonic imitation: conclusion

Returning to the question at hand: what is it that Torrance rejects by rejecting Platonic imitation? The question is complicated by the fact that in his aesthetic and ethical writings Plato himself rejects certain types of imitation. Indeed, it seems that Plato largely rejects what Torrance rejects: copying apart from divine influence. So how are we to understand Torrance's rejection of Platonic imitation? There are at least four possibilities:

1. Torrance has misread or only partially read Plato.
2. Torrance is affirming Plato's rejection of the negative type of imitation. When he rejects Platonic imitation, he does so in conscious concert with Plato himself.
3. Torrance is in fact rejecting Neoplatonic developments of the original Platonic concept of imitation that have influenced the church.
4. Torrance has in mind the exception raised by Plato (imitation of a virtuous character under divine inspiration) and is rejecting this positive type of imitation.

Finally (in something akin to option 1), it may be that Torrance has bought into a traditional rendering of imitation in the classics which overlooks the complexity of Plato's account and "gravitates towards [imitation as] copying, reproducing, mimicking, simulating or aping" (Kaftański, 2016:3). A traditional rendering of this sort makes two mistakes: it ignores Plato's own critique of this negative type of imitation, and it ignores the positive type of imitation that he propounded. That said, it seems unlikely that a scholar of Torrance's calibre would have made both of those mistakes. A charitable reading of Torrance rules out option 1. A common sense and plain reading of Torrance rules out option 2.

The most likely scenario is option 3. Torrance could be responding to aspects of church doctrine or practice broadly influenced by Platonic or Neoplatonic thought, without having all the technical nuances of Plato's own usage of imitation in mind. This would accord with the influence of *Timaeus* on Neoplatonism. In fact, Torrance overtly refers to Neoplatonism in certain of his references to imitation (e.g., Torrance, 1955:93). Torrance seldom attaches a citation to his references to Platonic imitation. In one instance he credits "Jewish circles in Alexandria" with interpretations "in terms of the Platonic doctrine of imitation" (Torrance, 1955:20). In speaking of the impact of *μίμησις* elsewhere, Torrance (1955:93–94; emphasis added) says the following:

The theology behind that derives, apparently, from the *Platonising tendencies long at work in Alexandria*. If a purely Platonic relation between eternity and time is envisaged, in which the temporal is but a transient image of the eternal, then the notion of the everlasting Gospel lifts the gravity of significance away from the historical Gospel.

The language here resonates with the quote from *Timaeus* above. Indeed, much of Torrance's critique of Platonic imitation is cast in the language of cosmology. For example:

... [the priestly function] is not a translation into terms of *space and time* of a *heavenly order*... [it] must not be understood as if it were within history a *replica of an eternal and celestial reality*. (Torrance, 1955:97; quoted in 3.2 above, emphasis mine).

It appears that Torrance is rejecting the Platonic presupposition of an original "συγγένεια" between the ideal and phenomenal realms. He is rejecting what he reads as an ontological monism underpinning a cosmological dualism in Plato's thinking. He is rejecting the notion of imitation as an independent "actualisation" of that monism.

Moreover, Torrance presumably included Philo as an important agent for the "Platonising tendencies" in Alexandria, albeit amongst others.<sup>50</sup> Philo was strongly influenced by Plato's cosmology and his usage of the imitation word group (Michaelis, 1967:664). We find imitation deployed in describing the same dualism between the sensory and intelligible worlds, and the same eternity–time relation envisaged above (e.g., Philo, 2005:1.16; cf. Michaelis, 1967:664). However, Philo is freer than Plato in advocating imitation in ethics (Michaelis, 1967:664–665). A Neoplatonic doctrine of imitation that retains the underlying complexity (and perhaps confusion) of the relation between cosmology and ethics, and yet makes frequent calls for imitation in ethics, could be the kind of doctrine Torrance would oppose. It could be the kind of doctrine that combines ontological monism and cosmological dualism into an imitation ethic of actualising innate divinity.<sup>51</sup>

Torrance's rejection of Platonic imitation could also be directed to the positive type of imitation – the type we encounter in Plato's later writings, which allow an exception in the imitation of the virtuous. Plato's exception is built on two premises: the virtue of the object of imitation, and the inspiration of the imitator under divine influence. That can hardly be described as mere copy-making. On the contrary, it sounds startlingly close to Torrance's own notion of participation by grace. Thus this option (option 4) is also not without its problems.

All things considered, it seems that Torrance's rejection of Plato's imitation focusses in the first place on Plato's cosmology, but includes the Neoplatonic concept of imitation that came later. Regardless of whether or not he has been fair in his reading of Plato, it is reasonably clear what

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<sup>50</sup> Torrance's understanding of eternity and time in Plato has support in Helm (2014). Helm (2014) also suggests the possible influence of Platonic notions of eternity and time on the church via Philo, though he cautions that the likelihood is uncertain.

<sup>51</sup> The nature of this argument is admittedly speculative. However, since Torrance offers no specific citation to my knowledge, we are restricted to arguments of this nature.

he is rejecting: the reproduction of heavenly realities by means of independent human being and agency exercised toward refining a pre-existing equality of natures (ontological monism). Torrance would argue that imitation of that sort undermines participation by grace and amounts to little more than external conformity to Christ.

### 3.3 Athanasius and the Greek fathers

Given his extraordinary influence on Torrance, we now turn to Athanasius. In a passage we have just considered, Torrance (1975:219) depicts Athanasius's understanding of the Creator–creature relation as follows:

All created existence is brought into being by the grace and pleasure of God... as entirely other than God, and yet continuously dependent upon the gift of his grace. That applies no less to the invisible realm of rational souls than to the visible realm of phenomena. And to all that he has made God assigns its proper order and function, thus conferring upon contingent existence an inherent intelligibility through his creative Logos... That is not to say that the rationality of creatures, things or souls, is an uncreated participation in the transcendent Rationality of God, or even a mimesis of that Rationality in some sort of Platonic *μέθεξις* for it is a participation only by God's grace; even in their contingent state in which they are naturally mutable and liable, i.e., corruptible and liable to dissolution, they are sustained in their creaturely structure or intelligibility by the continuous creative action of the divine Logos upon them from above and beyond all created existence.

Here Torrance asserts that Athanasius rejects the notion of mimesis because it contradicts participation by God's grace alone. Further into the same argument, Torrance (1975:229–231), citing chiefly *Contra Arianos*, argues that Athanasius casts salvation in terms of the “mediatorial life and person of the incarnate Son” over against salvation in terms of external, judicial relations as propounded by the Western church.

However, the evidence of parts of Athanasius's own writings, especially *Contra Arianos*, appears to mitigate Torrance's conclusions. In *Contra Arianos* (NPNF 2.4:404; cf. PG 26:364B), Athanasius writes:

... we are made sons through Him by adoption and grace, as partaking (*μετέχοντες*) of His Spirit... but we by imitation (*μίμησιν*) become virtuous and sons:—therefore not that we might become such as He, did He say ‘that they may be one as We are;’ but that as He, being the Word, is in His own Father, so that we too, taking an exemplar (*τύπον*) and looking at Him, might become one towards each other in concord and oneness of spirit...

In *De decretis*, Athanasius (*NPNF* 2.4:163; cf. *PG* 25:452B; emphasis added) writes:

... the Son was from the Father, and not merely like, but the same in likeness, and of shewing that the Son's likeness and unalterableness was different from such copy (*μίμησιν*) of the same as is ascribed to us, which we acquire from virtue on the ground of observance of the commandments.

These two quotes prompt Meijering (1968:144) to conclude, entirely contra Torrance, that Athanasius provides a synthesis between the Platonic concept of participation and the biblical concepts of imitation and obedience:

Participation is certainly to a large degree imitation of God. This imitation is an ethical category... We have the impression that according to Athanasius participation in God, imitation of God, and obedience to God (manifesting itself in the keeping of God's commandments) are very close to each other.

Indeed, Meijering's (e.g., 1968:121–122, 126, 128, 130–132) thesis is that while Athanasius rejected core doctrines of Platonism, such as divine hierarchy and divinity beyond being, he appropriated Platonic ideas and language into his ontology and cosmology. This is an important qualification of the traditional view that Athanasius “liberated Christianity from Greek philosophy” (Meijering, 1968:130). As such it is also a challenge to Torrance's account of a Western theology tainted by Greek philosophy over against a ‘purer line’ running through the Eastern fathers and some of the Reformers. In fact, Meijering (1968:159) extends the influence of Platonism to the Reformers and to Barth. We can conclude, at the very least, that Torrance's historical theology is open to challenge. As we have seen, his historical account of Western dualism is foundational to his depiction of an antithesis between participation and “Platonic imitation”. It follows that the latter is also open to challenge.

Torrance (1955:20) describes *παράδειγμα* as a load-bearing term in Platonic philosophy that carries connotations of Platonic imitation, that is, something that serves as a temporal exemplar of an eternal form. He deems it “highly significant” that the writer to the Hebrews forgoes *παράδειγμα* in favour of the relatively innocuous term *ὑπόδειγμα* (Torrance, 1955:20). Athanasius shares no such qualms over the use of *παράδειγμα*. The word and its cognates appear several times in *Contra Arianos* alone (*PG* 26:12–524). Newman and Robertson (*NPNF* 2.4:322, 365, 389) translate it variously as “example”, “Illustration”, “resemblance”, and “pattern”. *Παραδείγματα* in Athanasius are “the means of the divine economy to refer to something beyond created nature” (Cvetkovic, 2013:73), and as such imply participation by grace rather than nature. Indeed, Athanasius uses the term extensively to argue that participation in the Father is not by

nature, but by imitation. For example (Athanasius, *NPNF* 2.4:405; cf. *PG* 26:365A–C; emphasis added):

For as He taught us meekness from Himself, saying, ‘Learn of Me for I am meek and lowly in heart,’ not that we may become equal to Him, which is impossible, but that looking towards Him, we may remain meek continually, so also here wishing that our good disposition towards each other should be true and firm and indissoluble, from Himself taking the pattern (*παράδειγμα*), He says, ‘that they may be one as We are,’ whose oneness is indivisible; that is, that they learning from us of that indivisible Nature, may preserve in like manner agreement one with another. And this imitation (*μίμησις*) of natural conditions is especially safe for man, as has been said; for, since they remain and never change, whereas the conduct of men is very changeable, one may look to what is unchangeable by nature, and avoid what is bad and remodel himself on what is best. And for this reason also the words, ‘that they may be one in Us,’ have a right sense.

In this section of *Contra Arianos*, Athanasius (*NPNF* 2.4:399–406, esp. 404–406) is arguing against the Arian view that the Son is like the Father in the same way we are like the Father. He argues, on the contrary, that the Son is the Son by nature and we are sons by grace. He uses imitation to maintain the difference and qualify the meaning of participation. Our participation is not the fusion of identities or the sharing of natures. We are not called to be like the Father or the Son in uncreated nature. The call is to a likeness patterned after the reality according to our own nature and as an extension of the grace we have received. This is the function of imitation, and it is integral to understanding participation. Indeed, imitation is how participation is realised<sup>52</sup> (Athanasius, *NPNF* 2.4:404; cf. *PG* 26:364B):

... we are made sons through Him by adoption and grace, as partaking of His Spirit... He is the Truth...; but we by imitation (*μίμησιν*) become virtuous and sons.

A little further on, Athanasius continues (*NPNF* 2.4:405; cf. *PG* 26:21B–22A; emphasis added):

Suitably has He [Jesus] here too said, not, ‘that they may be in Thee as I am,’ but ‘as We are;’ now he who says ‘as’, signifies not identity, but an image and example (*παράδειγμα*) of the matter in hand. The Word then has the real and true identity of nature with the Father; but to us it is given to imitate (*μιμῆσθαι*) it.

Once again, that which Torrance considers antithetical to participation, his source includes as integral to participation. As in the case of Plato’s exceptional *μίμησις*, in Athanasius *παράδειγμα* does not undermine participation. Rather, in both cases the concepts serve to enrich our

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<sup>52</sup> This reading of the role of imitation in Athanasius has support in Russell (2015:160).

understanding of participation, and with it, our understanding of human agency in the Christian life. For Athanasius, participation controls our understanding of imitation, but the reverse is also true. Παράδειγμα helps him to convey that participation involves imitation as the reproduction of the divine pattern, and not the divine nature or reality. Imitation is a form of participation by grace. Even if we allow for Athanasius's rule that the meaning of words is subject to the reality they convey, his use of παράδειγμα points to a significant difference between Torrance and his source. In his exposition of Christian agency, Torrance at most accommodates a narrowly defined kind of imitation in a framework dominated by participation. In Athanasius, the role of imitation is much more explicit, and it is indispensable to a properly defined participation that does not imply shared nature.<sup>53</sup>

We move now to a brief survey of some of the other Greek fathers, following Russell (2015). Origen of Alexandria (*ANF* 4:378; cf. *PG* 11:197A–B) believed participation was achieved by imitation, as a response to divine initiative:

For on this account is Christ proposed as an example to all believers, because as He always, even before he knew evil at all, selected the good, and loved righteousness, and hated iniquity, and therefore God anointed Him with the oil of gladness; so also ought each one, after a lapse or sin, to cleanse himself from his stains, making Him his example (*exemplo*), and, taking Him as the guide of his journey, enter upon the steep way of virtue, that so perchance by this means, as far as possible we may, by imitating Him (*imitationem*), be made partakers (*participes*) of the divine nature...

For Origen, “the steep way” and “the means” to participation is imitation.

Gregory of Nazianzus uses the language of imitation to describe the idea of participation. In *On Easter and his reluctance*, he summons his readers to the following (Gregory Nazianzen, *NPNF* 2.7:203; cf. *PG* 35:397B; emphasis added):

Let us offer ourselves, the possession most precious to God, and most fitting; let us give back to the Image what is made after the Image. Let us recognize our Dignity; let us honour our Archetype (*ἀρχέτυπον*); let us know the power of the Mystery, and for what Christ died. Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become God's for His sake, since He for ours became Man.

Gregory's call to unity with God is made in terms of imitation (e.g., “... let us honour our Archetype... Let us become like Christ”). The repetition of the appeal “Let us” (subjunctive mood

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<sup>53</sup> For another reading of Athanasius that accommodates imitation, see Cvetkovic (2013:70, 89).

in the Greek) indicates a summons to Christian agency, but only in the context of created fellowship with the divine, initiated by God. This prompts Russell (2015:161) to describe Gregory's imitation as "transformative, not imitative in an external sense".

Cyril of Alexandria highlights two kinds of participation. One is by nature, the other is – relative, moral, external – by imitation. Our participation in Christ is of this latter kind. In arguing that the Son is God by nature, Cyril (1874–1885; cf. *PG* 73:45C–D) writes:

The name of family or fathership not God has of right from us, but we rather clearly received it from Him... But since God is that which is most ancient of all, by imitation (*μίμησιν*) are we fathers, who are called to His Pattern (*σχῆμα*) by reason of our being made after His Image... He is therefore by Nature (*κατὰ φύσιν*) the Father of the Word, He begat Him in all respects not unlike Himself... For we who are made after an imitation (*μίμησιν*) of Him, do not so have those that are begotten of us, but altogether equal, as regards the nature.

Later, arguing that the Son alone is light from light, Cyril (1874–1885; cf. *PG* 73:109D–110A) writes:

... by participation (*μετοχή*) of the One, whatever is called light, will be so deemed of by imitation (*μίμησιν*) of It... and irradiated by the participation (*μεθέξει*) of the Divine Nature, will they in imitation (*μίμησιν*) of It alike be called and be light.

Finally, in an exposition of John 1:12, Cyril (1874–1885; cf. *PG* 73:153B–C) writes:

Therefore we mount up unto dignity above our nature for Christ's sake, and we too shall be sons of God, not like Him in exactitude (*ἀπαραλλάκτως*), but by grace in imitation (*μίμησιν*) of Him. For He is Very Son, existing from the Father; we adopted by His Kindness, through grace... And again He is clearly seen to be Very Son, proved by comparison with ourselves. For since that which is by Nature has another mode of being from that which is by adoption, and that which is in truth from that which is by imitation (*μίμησιν*), and we are called sons of God by adoption and imitation (*μίμησιν*)...

Thus, in Cyril, imitation (coupled with prior grace in adoption) is participation of the kind appropriate to human agents, except for the Son himself.

We have briefly surveyed some of the Greek fathers, since they are the authorities to whom Torrance appeals. He does so because he views an underemphasis on participation and an overemphasis on imitation as products of the Latin heresy dominant in Western theology. However, a closer examination of the Greek fathers themselves has revealed that they do not see the relation between participation and imitation as mutually exclusive or even in tension. They

do not downplay imitation in their emphasis on participation. On the contrary, imitation is integral to their exposition of participation. To imitate Christ is to exercise the agency created in adoption as sons by grace. Imitation is an expression of participation by grace. In the writings of the fathers it is precisely by imitation that participation is maintained, strengthened and deepened without eliding into identity of nature. This is somewhat at odds with Torrance's depiction of imitation as irrelevant or antithetical to participation by grace.

### 3.4 John Calvin and Søren Kierkegaard, in brief

In earlier chapters I have made only passing reference to the influence of Calvin and Kierkegaard on Torrance. While both men undoubtedly influenced Torrance (e.g., Heron, 2010; Torrance, 1992b:252), I have focussed on other sources with a more direct bearing on the question at hand. Nevertheless, without specifying the precise scope and extent of their influence, it remains useful, for the sake of building an inferential argument, to know where Calvin and Kierkegaard themselves stood on participation, imitation and human agency.

Agan (2013:801) argues that there is a widely held and longstanding view in Protestant orthodox scholarship that Calvin was hostile to the imitation of Christ in the Christian life.<sup>54</sup> He goes on to present compelling evidence that, while Calvin certainly renounced the abuse of imitation, he also advocated strongly for its proper use (Agan, 2013; cf. Shuster, 1998:77–78).

Agan quotes a number of passages from the *Institutes* and Calvin's commentaries to make his case. The following are exemplary (Calvin quoted in Agan, 2013:807, 809, 810<sup>55</sup>):

Christ, through whom we return into favor with God, has been set before us as an example [*exemplar*], whose pattern [*formam*] we ought to express [*exprimamus*] in our life. What more effective thing can you require than this one thing? Nay, what can you require beyond this one thing? For we have been adopted as sons by the Lord with this one condition: that our life express [*repraesentet*] Christ, the bond of our adoption.

... in Christ there is a living and conspicuous example which is set before all the sons of God for their imitation [*ad imitationem*].

If we want the obedience of Christ to be of advantage to us, we must copy it [*nos eam imitemur*].

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<sup>54</sup> To illustrate this bias in Calvin scholarship, Agan (2013:802) cites the examples of McGrath (1991), Spencer (2011), and Horton (2011). Hood (2017) and Vos (2017:272) are further examples of those who acknowledge a general bias against *imitatio Christi* in the history of Protestantism.

<sup>55</sup> The first quote is from the *Institutes* (3.6.3), the second is from Calvin's commentary on Romans 8:29, and the third is from Calvin's commentary on Hebrews 5:8. Notably, Systma (2010:269–270) also argues from Calvin's commentary on Romans 8:28–30 that the Reformer was pro imitation.

From the first two quotes above, it is clear that in Calvin's conception participation and imitation are "complementary rather than competing realities" (Agan, 2013:809). Indeed, "Calvin argues that adoption *entails* the imitation of Christ's life on earth" (Systema, 2010:273; emphasis added). From the second two quotes it is clear that Calvin uses the express language of imitation to describe Christian agency.

From these and a wide range of similar quotations, Agan (2013:806–810) derives four principles that describe Calvin's understanding of the role and nature of imitation in the Christian life: imitation flows from the gospel; imitation represents dependence on Christ; imitation is an expression of union with Christ; imitation is a central theme in the Christian life. He concludes that imitation of Christ has "shaped the very architecture by which Calvin conceived of the Christian life" (Agan, 2013:812). This is a wholesale departure from what Agan considers the standard Protestant orthodox interpretation of Calvin as regards imitation. That said, it is one Agan shares with others, like Systema (2010) and Vos (2017).

In fact, Torrance (1988b:74) himself points to the role of imitation in Calvin's thought. He says of the classic medieval work on imitation (*De Imitatione Christi* by Thomas à Kempis), "... there can hardly be any doubt about the fact that views from this same source had considerable influence in the formation of Calvin's thought". Nevertheless, Torrance (1988b:79) is mixed in his own appraisal of *De Imitatione Christi*, claiming that the work "could still hold a modified doctrine of human merit". As such, Torrance (1988b:79) concludes it formed part of Calvin's framework only in a reconstructed form.

Beyond the few remarks above, I have not investigated how Torrance himself interprets Calvin in the areas of participation, imitation and agency. Suffice to say that Torrance was broadly appreciative of Calvin, though not uncritically so (Heron, 2010). Calvin influenced Torrance, but in the areas under consideration, Torrance appears to hold a view on imitation closer to the Protestant orthodox reading of Calvin than to Calvin himself. On the evidence reviewed above, Calvin sees imitation as an entailment of participation. Accordingly, he views the relation between human and divine agency as a positive-sum game. Torrance, on the other hand, seems to share the prevalent Protestant "nervousness about using the term [imitation]" (Tinsley quoted in Agan, 2013:801). Accordingly, his depiction of the relation between human and divine agency is much closer to a zero-sum game.

As already mentioned, I have not investigated Kierkegaard's influence on Torrance beyond Torrance's adaption of the phrase "a teleological suspension of ethics". That said, a brief foray into Kierkegaard's understanding of imitation proves fruitful. For example, Vos (2017) makes the case that Kierkegaard was an ardent advocate of a properly qualified mimesis. Moreover,

Kaftański (2016) argues that Kierkegaard relied heavily on Platonic mimesis for his understanding of imitation. Thus Kierkegaard, drawing on Plato, was in favour of the imitation of Christ, albeit of a very particular kind. Torrance's rejection of Platonic imitation, alongside his affirmation of Kierkegaard's "suspension of ethics", prompts further inquiry.

Kaftański (2016:2–10) discerns two types of imitation in Kierkegaard writings: *etterfølgelse* and *etterabelse*. Kierkegaard endorses *etterfølgelse* as a positive 'following after' an "ideal self that has been established by God" (Kaftański, 2016:8). Kierkegaard rejects *etterabelse* as a negative 'aping', or unthinking assimilation of social mores and values. It is precisely justification "in terms of social norms", or 'aping', that Kierkegaard rejects when he calls for a "teleological suspension of ethics" (MacDonald, 2017). Of course, this is the very phrase Torrance adapts in calling for a "soteriological suspension of ethics". Did he have Kierkegaard's rejection of negative imitation in mind when he did so? We cannot say for sure, but it seems a reasonable deduction.

Kaftański's (2016:1, 4) central thesis is that Kierkegaard derives his model of imitation from Plato. If Kaftański is correct, his thesis highlights the tension in Torrance already identified. Torrance affirms Kierkegaard on the one hand but rejects Plato on the other, and yet Kierkegaard built his model on Plato. This tension lends credence to the argument raised above, that in rejecting Platonic mimesis, Torrance was in fact rejecting Neoplatonic models of imitation that approximate the negative type of imitation itself rejected by Plato, and later by Kierkegaard. Thus Kierkegaard's adaption of the Platonic model, and Torrance's adaption of Kierkegaard, casts light on what exactly Torrance was rejecting when he rejected Platonic mimesis.

Vos (2017) draws supporting conclusions. He argues that Kierkegaard acknowledged the dangers of a misapplied imitation. Kierkegaard distinguished between imitation and mere copying that could easily "become a perverted mimicking" (Vos, 2017:280). On the other hand, he argued strongly that the abandonment of imitation was deep hypocrisy (Kierkegaard quoted in Vos, 2017:282):

Christ demands imitation ... he is ... the prototype oriented to the universally human, of which everyone is capable. Now human craftiness comes in again; we invert getting out of imitation, as if this were humility, and invert wanting to imitate Christ, as if this were presumption, as if he (generally like the extraordinary) would be angry about it, offended by it. O, human hypocrisy.

Vos (2017:272, 281–282) asserts that here Kierkegaard is attacking the cultural Christianity (or socio-ethical norms) of his day. Kierkegaard's position was the direct inversion of the prevailing Protestantism that viewed imitation as hypocrisy (Vos, 2017:281–282). Kierkegaard was convinced this was a cover to cheapen grace and ease the ethical demands of the Christian

life (ibid.). On the contrary, Kierkegaard posited a costly grace that demanded imitation (ibid.).<sup>56</sup> Vos (2017:281) argues that Bonhoeffer followed Kierkegaard's conception of costly grace, which, as we have seen, later influenced Torrance.

While I have not fully established a direct line of influence between Kierkegaard and Torrance, there are at least three related strands of evidence to consider. Firstly, Torrance's adaption of Kierkegaard's "suspension of ethics" suggests that he may also have appropriated his rejection of negative imitation from Kierkegaard. Second, Kierkegaard drew heavily on Plato in his understanding of imitation. This implies that on the issue of imitation Torrance affirms Kierkegaard but rejects his source, Plato. Third, Kierkegaard's articulation of costly grace and the agency of the Christian disciple influenced Bonhoeffer, and Bonhoeffer in turn influenced Torrance (Torrance, 1971:73–78; Vos, 2017:281). Despite the influence, there was one ingredient that did not survive the transmission from Kierkegaard to Torrance via Bonhoeffer in anything like its original form – the imitation of Christ. Imitation is an important concept to Kierkegaard, and at least nascent in Bonhoeffer (argued below). Torrance, however, tends to avoid imitation, or uses it negatively to define participation (i.e., 'participation is more than mere imitation'). These three strands of evidence highlight the differences between Torrance and his sources.

### 3.5 Karl Barth

Barth has been accused of marginalising human agency by the sheer dominance of divine agency in his dogmatics (Webster, 1998:1). On the other hand, he has also been accused of the "conversion of dogmatics into ethics" (Ebeling quoted in Webster, 1998:176). That he faces critics on both sides is a clue to the nature of his treatment of the topic, which we explore below.

Webster (1995:2–4) argues that Barth's magnum opus, *Church Dogmatics*, has three characteristics that act as a hermeneutical key:

1. It is one extended exposition of the statement "God is" (cf. Busch, 2008:1). As such, it focusses relentlessly on divine freedom, which Barth considers axiomatic.
2. Since God's free agency is specified in the history of Jesus Christ, *Church Dogmatics* is also necessarily an anthropology. It is in fact a The-anthropology (Barth quoted in Webster, 1995:3):

"Theology,' in the literal sense, means the science and doctrine of God. A very precise definition of the Christian endeavour in this respect would really require the more complex term

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<sup>56</sup> The concept of costly grace predates Kierkegaard. It can be found in the writings of Thomas Cranmer, for example (Muller, 2018).

'The-anthropology'. For an abstract doctrine of God has no place in the Christian realm, only a 'doctrine of God and of man', a doctrine of the commerce and communion between God and man."

3. Given the first two characteristics, *Church Dogmatics* is essentially an ethical dogmatics or dogmatic ethics, which by nature is an account of the agency of humanity as covenantal partner to God (cf. Busch, 2008:53).

Thus, in his most important theological writings, Barth is concerned from the outset and throughout to give an account of human agency. This instinct carries through to his more explicitly ethical writings.

In the prolegomena to Barth's *Ethics* (1981), we find much of what Torrance attributes to Barth and develops in his own thought. We find an implicit rejection of the Latin heresy in a number of disparaging comments relating to the Greek philosophical influences on Western theology. We find Barth fingering, in the roots of Western theology, the ontological monism that underpins the dualisms of the Latin heresy (cf. Baker, 2010:10). We find the indivisible oneness of divine being and agency as an integrating force, and the radical objectivity that is its entailment. Indeed, Barth's entire thesis on what constitutes theological ethics is built on the assertion of the Word of God as supreme objective reality and sovereign Subject in relation to all creation. All of these shared themes do not, however, map onto a common ethic. Indeed, Webster (1998:6) contends that "... the underlying conviction of the whole Ethics cycle is that the Word which disrupts the pretence of autonomy is also a communicative presence which establishes moral response." Torrance would wholeheartedly agree with the first half of Barth's conviction, though may prove less enthusiastic about the second. There are some significant differences between Barth and Torrance, which are explored below.

Barth (1981:3) defines theological ethics as follows:

Ethics as a theological discipline is the auxiliary science in which an answer is sought in the Word of God to the question of the goodness of human conduct. As a special elucidation of the doctrine of sanctification it is reflection on how far the Word of God proclaimed and accepted in Christian preaching effects a definite claiming of man.

Ethics is distinct from cognate social sciences such as psychology, sociology and law in that "it has to do with the validity of what is valid for all human action, the origin of all constancies, the worth of everything universal, the rightness of all rules" (Barth, 1981:5). It probes the foundational questions of validity, origin, worth, and rightness of the cognate fields of inquiry, and as such transcends them.

Barth (1981:5–9) turns to defend his definition and to expound the relationship between theology and ethics. He demonstrates that in the early church ethics was scarcely an independent discipline (cf. Brock, 2012:274–277). At this juncture he notes that where it did receive attention there was a “compulsion to follow the familiar channels of thought of Aristotle and Stoicism”. This carried over into the medieval church, where the ethics of the *Summa* “unambiguously has its basis in Aristotle”. Nevertheless, for the most part ethical questions were addressed in dogmatic treatments and had no independent basis. That only began to change in the post-Reformation era with the introduction of Cartesian philosophy and the subjective turn. By the eighteenth century and with the likes of Schleiermacher, ethics had taken pride of place over dogmatics. By the nineteenth century, ethics had swallowed dogmatics completely.

Barth (1981:9) concludes that the independence of ethics is a relatively new phenomenon, and he describes that independence as ‘a problem’. At the heart of the ‘problem’ is the implication for the sovereign agency of the Word of God (Barth, 1981:12):

We regard all these attempts at a methodological distinction between dogmatics and ethics as ethically suspect because with great regularity there takes place in all of them a suspicious change in direction, a suspicious exchange of subjects, namely, of God and man... This suspicious exchange, however, rests on the suspicious hypothesis that revelation puts theology in a position to speak of God and man in one and the same breath, and to do so wholly to man’s advantage... But this hypothesis and the exchange based upon it involve quite simply the surrender of theology, at any rate of Christian theology. Theology is Christian theology when and so far as its statements relate to revelation. Revelation, however, is the revelation of God and not of pious man. If there is a shift of direction, even with an appeal to revelation, so that theology is suddenly looking at believing spontaneity, at what we are to become and to make of ourselves, at the outworking of the essence of Christianity, or however the formula runs, then there is in reality a turning away from revelation and it ceases to be theology. The supposed expansion of the subject means in fact its loss.

On the contrary (Barth, 1981:13):

Theology is a presentation of the reality of the Word of God directed to man... the definition of theology cannot equally well be reversed... One may thus say that first not just dogmatics but theology in general includes from the very first and at every point the problem of ethics. But the man to whom God’s Word is directed can never become the theme or subject of theology. He is not in any sense a second subject of theology which must be approached with a shift of focus... For even though theology neither can nor should lose sight of it for a single moment, the reality of the man whom God’s Word addresses is not at all on the same plane as the reality of the Word of God, so that there cannot be that coordination of looking upward and downward which is envisaged in the above-mentioned formulae of modern writers.

Indeed, Barth (1981:13–14) argues that the independence of ethics and the entailed shift in focus from God to man is based on the false premise of an ontological monism. Barth describes it as “the idea of a synthesis and continuity between nature and supernature” – an essentially pagan idea that corrupted the early church.

Having rejected an independent ethic and affirmed the proper relation of man to the Word of God as one of predicate relating to Subject, Barth asks exactly how ethics functions as a task of theology. The answer he proffers is in the doctrine of sanctification. In preaching, the Word of God lays claim to man. This claim is called sanctification. Sanctification describes how (Barth, 1981:16)

... the reality of the Word of God embraces the reality of the man who receives it and therefore gives the Christian answer to the question of the goodness of human conduct. Good means sanctified by God. This is how we may briefly formulate the answer, bluntly challenging the need for special ethics in theology as we recall the strong total content of the concept of sanctification. To remember not only the ethical character of dogmatics in general but also the express answer to the ethical question that is given in the doctrine of sanctification is to ensure that ethics is not possible as an independent discipline alongside dogmatics.

Barth (1981:16–17) goes further to present the outcome of sanctification as a moral ontology:

As we will, we are. What we do, we are. Man does not exist and also act. He exists as he acts...  
The question of whether and how far he acts rightly is thus none other than the question whether he exists rightly.

It is obvious that this moral ontology does not impinge on divine freedom or abolish human freedom. It is key to Barth’s seemingly compatibilist account of human freedom and agency (Barth in Couenhoven, 2010:246; emphasis original; cf. Busch, 2008:53–56):

The decisive point is whether freedom in the Christian sense is identical with the freedom of Hercules: choice between two ways at a crossroad. This is a heathen notion of freedom. Is it freedom to decide for the devil? The only freedom that means something is freedom to be myself as I am created by God. God did not create a neutral creature, but *His* creature.

In short, for Barth (1981:17), ethics is concerned with the goodness of human conduct, and dogmatics states that human conduct is good insofar as God sanctifies it. As such, ethics is an auxiliary discipline, but not independent of dogmatics. He rejects a relation of identity. He also rejects a relation of radical distinction. By relating ethics as auxiliary to dogmatics, Barth (1981:19) is attempting to avoid dogmatics that falls into spectator-metaphysics, and ethics that carries the name “theological” but is ultimately pagan.

With the preliminaries in place, Barth (1981:55–60) assembles the matrix structure of his theological ethics. He does so on the basis of what he believes the Word of God actually says: God commands and lays claim to man as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer. Man is co-ordinately claimed as creature, as pardoned sinner, and as heir of the kingdom. Barth expounds each of these standpoints according to its uniqueness, noetic basis, decisive content, and fulfilment. The results can be summarised as follows (Barth, 1981:55–60):

The Word of God as the command of the Creator is unique in describing the necessity or obligation of life. The will of God in giving us existence conditions our understanding of good conduct. We know this necessity or obligation as calling, as “commandedness”, as a determined existence in the Word of God. The content of the command is order, in that we are called to an ordered life. The fulfilment of the command is faith – trusting in God, who is our Creator and Lord.

The Word of God as the command of the Reconciler is unique in describing the necessity or obligation of law. The command judges and opposes man as sinner even as it welcomes him by grace. We know this necessity or obligation by the human authority of ‘commissioned fellowmen’, like Moses. The content of the command is humility, in that it shows us our station as pardoned sinners. The fulfilment of the command is love, in that we are humbled on the way to returning the love of God, who loved us first, and loving our fellowman, whom we love as a demonstration of our love for God.

The Word of God as the command of the Redeemer is unique in describing the necessity or obligation of promise, in which God’s command conditions our conduct “from the eschatological boundary” with the pledge of consummation. We know this necessity or obligation by the voice of conscience as “the recollection of the perfect” and the goal of our conduct. The content of the command is gratitude as we give all of ourselves in a thank-offering to God. The fulfilment of the command is hope – an orientation in our conduct towards the coming perfection, a seeking after God.

This is the framework of Barth’s theological ethics, as he defined it in lectures given in 1928 to 1929 (Bromiley in translator’s preface to Barth, 1981:vi). Out of this framework, after further thought and refinement, would emerge what Barth later considered the dominant ethos of the Christian life, “the primary rubric under which Christian agency is set” (Webster, 1998:153), namely, the “invocation of God”, or simply put, prayer. Webster (1995:175; cf. Busch, 2008:56) argues that a right understanding of invocation requires that we acknowledge the three balancing characteristics of Barth’s account. The first is a strict asymmetry between divine and human agency. For Barth, divine agency is axiomatic and human agency is a corollary. Second, notwithstanding this asymmetrical relation, human action has significance. Third, the

eschatological setting of the Christian life between reconciliation and redemption makes the question of human agency important.

Barth maintains that when we invoke the Father, the vocative case indicates God's priority as Subject, and our subsequence as those who invoke. The vocative case is descriptive of the asymmetrical relation between the "the self-acting Subject-Father" and those who call on him (Barth quoted in Webster, 1995:177).

Does this invocation abolish human agency? Barth answers "no" on the basis of the grace of God actualised in the incarnation. Jesus Christ is the root of human agency and the foundation of human freedom. The authorisation to call on God is established in his divine humanity (Webster, 1995:182). But the person of Jesus does not merely issue permission; he also stands as a summons to exercise the gift of true agency as children of God (Webster, 1995:184). In Barth's own words (quoted in Webster, 1995:187):

What God the Father wills with and for us to his own glory and our salvation is more than a solid but stationary relation or a firm but passive connection. He is the living Father of his living children. What he wills with and for these children is, therefore, history, intercourse, and living dealings between himself and them, between them and himself. They too have to enter into these dealings on their side. They have to actualize the partnership in this history. They have to express in word and deed his fatherhood and their sonship. This is why he calls upon them and commands them to call upon him.

Living as we do between Christ's past reconciling agency and his future agency in final redemption is both a limit and a spur to our agency. This "Christological–eschatological frame" limits human action as entirely enveloped and relativised by the "overwhelmingly efficacious" acts of God. But by placing human action in the context of Christ's action, human action is established and summoned. Indeed, for Barth, to reject this summons and surrender to passivity is itself sin (Webster, 1995:196, 202).

Christian ethos as invocation is Barth's attempt to evade the false dichotomy of either autonomy or heteronomy as the only models for human agency. Instead, he posits a third way: an analogical relation between divine agency and human agency (Webster, 1995:211; cf. Nimmo, 2010). Barth (quoted in Webster, 1995:212) describes the proper place for the human agency established by invocation as follows:

Precisely because perfect righteousness stands before them as God's work, precisely because they are duly forbidden to attempt the impossible, precisely because all experiments in this direction are prevented and prohibited, they are with great strictness required and with great kindness forced and empowered to do what they can do in the sphere of the relative possibilities assigned to them,

to do it very imperfectly yet heartily, quietly, and cheerfully. They are absolved from wasting time and energy over the impassable limits of their sphere of action and thus missing the opportunities that present themselves in this sphere. They may and can and should rise up and accept responsibility to the utmost of their power for the doing of the little righteousness.

In outlining his *Ethics* and in his later writings on the topic, Barth makes a number of assertions that are apposite to this study. We have already encountered many strong statements on the sovereign primacy of the divine agency. Statements such as this (Barth, 1981:49):

Justice will be done to the special problem of Christian ethics... when we do not let human conduct as such be the centre, the beginning, and the end of theological ethics, but allot this position instead to man's claiming by the Word of God, to his sanctification, to God's action in and on his own action.

God's agency stands at the beginning, centre and end of theological ethics. Man's agency is derivative of God's agency. Nevertheless, man's agency is no less agency for deriving its agency from divine reality. Indeed, in the writings surveyed, there are a number of positive statements of human agency, such as these (Barth, 1981:59; Barth quoted in Webster, 1998:110):

The one to whom God is gracious... this person – and we should not shrink from saying this even though we must weigh its meaning very carefully – *this person does good acts*. (Emphasis mine)

God is Spirit, and therefore He truly awakens man to freedom. That He causes His divine power to come on him does not mean that He overtakes and overwhelms and crushes him, forcing him to be what He would have him be. He does not dispose of him like a mere object. He creates him, and indeed establishes him, as a free subject. He sets him on his own feet as His partner.

Here the good of human agency is undoubtedly its determination by divine agency. Nevertheless, the agency of the individual Christian truly exists. Indeed, it exists by the command of God, no less.

Throughout *Ethics*, we find strong statements of participation in the vicarious righteousness of Christ (e.g., Barth, 1981:289–292, 410, 459). That said, for Barth, participation in the righteousness of Christ does not crowd out Christian agency – it summons it. Participation in Christ gives vitality and meaning to Christian agency. In that it rests entirely in the perfect agency of Christ, ours is an “improper”, “symbolical” and “substitute” agency, but it is nevertheless “required of us” (Barth, 1981:408–409). It has meaning only in Christ, and yet it has meaning. And so Barth makes a number of positive statements affirming this kind of Christian agency. For example (Barth, 1981:412; emphasis added):

If our work takes place in the submission appropriate to those who know that they must sacrifice, but that they can only offer unclean sacrifices, that only one clean sacrifice has been and will be offered in time and eternity, and that our sacrifices stand or fall by being accepted for the sake of that one sacrifice, then, from that standpoint at least, it is good work.

Barth's (1981:512; emphasis added) definition of Hope presents a similar understanding:

The commandment of God is fulfilled by me, i.e., my work is good, it is obedience to the command of promise, and is conscientious and grateful work, to the extent that I am told, and let myself be told, that it is done in unity with the will of my Redeemer. That this is told me, and that I let it be told me, is, as the work of the Holy Spirit, the reality of hope.

In the context of sovereign free agency of God and participation in the righteousness of Christ, Barth posits human agency. He takes this agency very seriously, not least because it will be the subject of divine judgement. Indeed, "fulfilling the command is no less a concern of ours, of our conduct, because it is God's concern alone to say whether our conduct is really a fulfilment" (Barth, 1981:512). Barth, for all his unremitting emphasis on the sovereign agency of God, presents a positive account of the agency of man.

It is true that he steers clear of the express language of imitation. In his introduction to *Ethics*, Barth (1981:6, 30) mentions imitation only twice, and in a pejorative sense in both instances. However, in both instances his attack was on an independent imitation premised on ontological monism. Thus I take his reticence to be polemically motivated (cf. Nimmo, 2010:233). As mentioned above, Barth takes pains to contradict the ontological monism that he finds as the basis of much of Western and especially Roman Catholic theology. The idea of continuity between nature and supernature has a bearing on the Roman Catholic concepts of grace and imitation (Barth, 1981:408; emphasis added):

The Roman Catholic concept of grace, which sees it as possible and even necessary that those to whom God is gracious should be put in a position to acquire merit, i.e., to cooperate in their salvation, rendering satisfaction to God intrinsically – this concept of grace as a divine likeness infused into our thinking, willing and doing differs as a concept from grace itself.

And so Barth rejects Roman Catholic imitation for much the same reason as Torrance rejects Platonic imitation – it is premised on ontological monism and implies intrinsic merit. Nevertheless, Barth (1981:454; emphasis added) uses language suggestive of an imitation that does not imply divinisation or intrinsic merit:

Within that limit [total depravity] our action, to be called good, must be, not an actualising, which God reserves for himself, but a representation, copy and mirror of the divine action.

For Barth, human agency not only exists, it is required, and indeed it is good, if it is an appropriately defined 'imitation' of the divine agency. Indeed, he casts the ultimate divine command of conformity to Jesus Christ in terms of both participation and imitation (Barth, quoted in Nimmo, 2010:236):

If in fellowship with Christ Christians have to be μιμηταὶ θεοῦ [imitators of God] (Eph. 5.1), if the τελειότης [perfection], the fulfilment of the being and essence... of their heavenly Father is the measure and norm of their own τελειότης [perfection] (Matt. 5:48), then in its original and final authority and compulsion the demand addressed to them is necessarily this and no other.

In other words, our fellowship with God (participation) compels imitation. Webster (1995:184; emphasis added) makes precisely the same point as he expounds the implications of Barth's ethos of invocation for human agency:

The entire meditation on the vocative structure of Christian ethics is undergirded, not by a single insistence on 'Christ in our place', but by two interlocking Christological-anthropological affirmations. First, there is an account of Christ's relationship to humanity whose guiding motif is that of the vicarious humanity of Christ. Christians are enabled to call upon God as Father by virtue of their election as children in the Son, in the benefits of whose assumption of humanity they share. The vocative 'Father', and the moral acts which correspond to it, thus point beyond the action of the one who invokes, not only to the antecedent subjectivity of God, but also to Jesus Christ's own invocation of the Father, in which the covenant obligations are fulfilled in our stead.

Alongside this vicarious humanity model, however, there is a complementary account of Christ's relationship to humanity as generative and *exemplary*. Thus Barth can write that Jesus Christ 'founded calling on God the Father – and made it binding on his people – by doing it first himself, and in so doing giving a *prior example* of what he demanded of them, or rather, demanding it of them by himself doing it.'

Barth himself (in Couenhoven, 2010:253; emphasis added) expresses human freedom and agency as analogous to divine self-determination, once again in language suggestive of imitation:

Freedom is the joy whereby man acknowledges and confesses this divine election by willing, deciding, and determining himself to be the *echo and mirror* of the divine act.

Busch (2008:56; emphasis original) offers this summary of Barth:

Human freedom then is obedience in that it *conforms* to the use that God makes of his own freedom.

For all their similarities, this reading of Barth's theological ethics shows up significant differences between Barth and Torrance. Where Torrance largely remains silent, except to call for a soteriological suspension of ethics, Barth writes extensively on the topic. Indeed, he considers theology concerned "from the very first and at every point [with] the problem of ethics" (Barth, 1981:13). While Torrance largely skirts the theme of human agency, Barth gives a positive account of what human agency is and how it should function. While Torrance openly rejects Platonic imitation and at best accommodates biblical references to imitation, Barth employs language suggestive of support for a properly qualified imitation. For the purpose of this study, these are important differences. We can conclude that in his account of participation, imitation and human agency, Torrance has departed from Barth. Where Barth holds participation and imitation in tension to offer a positive account of human agency, Torrance has narrowed his focus on participation and leaves the notion of Christian agency largely undeveloped.

### **3.6 Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Bonhoeffer had significant interaction with Barth. His theological ethics was developed in close conversation with Barth's attempt to ground ethics in dogmatics (Tödt et al. in editors' afterword to the German edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:416, 419). Both men had an appreciation for the work of the other, but with strong critical reservations (Tödt et al. in editors' afterword to the German edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:434; Tödt, 1993:32). On the other hand, there is a profound affinity between Bonhoeffer and Torrance. Indeed, in my own assessment, amongst those who influenced Torrance it is hard to find a theologian with whom he has a deeper resonance, especially in the area of the relation between theology and ethics. Reading Bonhoeffer and his appraisers immediately suggests several fundamental points of contact and agreement with Torrance. It very quickly becomes obvious why Torrance would affirm and appropriate his ideas.

We find the connection rooted at the depth of common presuppositions, influences and methods. For example, Bonhoeffer is a philosophical realist (Green in editor's introduction to the English edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:20). He is concerned with questions of ontology, which he defines as an objective reality independent of the subjective thinker (Plant, 2014:137). He rejects Aristotelian abstraction from the concrete situation (Green in editor's introduction to the English edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:16; Plant, 2014:121–146). He rejects dualist habits of thought (Tödt et al. in editors' afterword to the German edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:417). His organising instinct is towards integration rather than "division, disunion, dualism" (Green in editor's introduction to the English edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:9). He achieves integration by outlining an account of reality centred in Christ and his incarnation (Tödt et al. in editors' afterword to the German edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:428–429). He draws heavily from classical and Reformed theology (Green in

editor's introduction to the English edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:6, 11). As we have seen, all of these are prominent features in Torrance's own thought and writing.

In his theological ethics, Bonhoeffer is thoroughly Christocentric (Green in editor's introduction to the English edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:5–6). In his Christology and soteriology, he places emphasis on the incarnation. Salvation is to be understood ontologically as a reconciliation between God and man that happens when God becomes man in the person of Christ. Ontological reconciliation between God and man in the person of Jesus Christ is the "methodological starting point for *Ethics*" (Green in editor's introduction to the English edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:7). He builds his ethic on the free, responsible, vicarious and representative action of Christ which transfers by analogy into free, responsible, vicarious and representative action of the Christian.<sup>57</sup> The latter takes place in correspondence with reality, that is, within the context of the Christian's own concrete situation (Green in editor's introduction to the English edition, in Bonhoeffer, 2005:12–13). Christian ethics involves "*participating in the reality of God and the world in Jesus Christ today*" (Bonhoeffer, 2005:55; emphasis original). As such, Bonhoeffer affirms an ethic emerging from participation in Christ. He also "rejects *imitatio Christi*... as an activity that starts from the human being" (Green in Bonhoeffer, 2005:93n73). In short, Bonhoeffer presents his ethic within a framework of participation, and he rejects imitation as the exercise of independent agency. In these areas Torrance is in almost perfect agreement with Bonhoeffer. Indeed, David Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, organises his widely read textbook on modern theologians such that Torrance and Bonhoeffer are grouped together (along with Barth and Jüngel; see Plant, 2014:146).

There is one interesting and perhaps profoundly significant difference between Bonhoeffer and Torrance. Where Torrance affirms the patristic axiom that God became man in order that man might become God (Habets, 2009:113), Bonhoeffer (2005:96) explicitly rejects that axiom and reformulates it in favour of renewed humanity:

... human beings do not become God. They could not and do not accomplish a change in form; God changes God's form into human form in order that human beings can become, not God, but human before God.

For Bonhoeffer, the end goal of God's redeeming work in Christ is humanisation rather than divinisation. This might explain why Bonhoeffer (2005:226–227; emphasis added), for all his

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<sup>57</sup> There are those who view vicarious representative action as the leitmotif in Bonhoeffer's ethics (Tödt, 1993:5).

stress on participation, still expounds a real human agency, albeit passive and entirely dependent on God's prior agency:

Precisely those who act in the *freedom of their very own responsibility* see their action as both flowing into and springing from God's guidance. *Free action, as it determines history, recognizes itself ultimately as being God's action*, the purest activity as passivity... Only where freedom understands its origin, essence, and goal to be grounded in God's own action, which means only where it is God who appears on the scene as an acting subject (through the free, responsible action of a human being), can we speak about good in history...

Thus, God's agency brings about a real human agency. God as agent works through human agency without voiding it. On the contrary, it is only as God works that human agency has any life or meaning. Human agency is effective, responsible, and real, not in spite of but because of God's sovereign agency. Bonhoeffer (2005:337–338) underscores the point in his discussion of the relation between divine and human love:

[It] must not be misunderstood as if the divine love indeed preceded human love, but only in order to activate it as an autonomous human doing, independent and free from the divine love. On the contrary, for all that has to be said about human love, the premise still holds that God is love. Since there is no love that would be independent, autonomous, and free from God's love, it is this love of God and none other with which human beings love God and neighbor. As such, human love thus remains purely passive...

In order to make this intelligible, some clarifying remarks about the concept of passivity are still necessary in this context... Passivity with respect to God's love does not mean the kind of resting in a love of God that excludes any thoughts, words, and deeds, and that I experience only in such a 'quiet hour'... To be loved by God certainly does not prohibit human beings from thinking powerful thoughts and doing joyful deeds. It is as whole human beings, as thinking and acting human beings, that we are loved by God in Christ, that we are reconciled with God. And as whole human beings, thinking and acting, we love God and our brothers and sisters.

Bonhoeffer may reject imitation as independent human agency, but he clearly does not reject human agency per se. On his account, Christ came to make mankind truly human, and this issues in real human agency, but it is only real *in him*. In that sense it is entirely passive. This passivity must not be understood psychologically, so as to paralyse human agency; it must be understood theologically, so as to vivify and animate human agency (Bonhoeffer, 2005:337). Bonhoeffer (2005:47–49) defines human agency as an *embedded reality*. It is a *penultimate reality*.<sup>58</sup> It is a *mandate* (Bonhoeffer, 2005:68). Even so, embedded reality does not imply sublimation "of the

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<sup>58</sup> "Christian life is the dawn of the ultimate in me, the life of Jesus Christ in me. But it is also always life in the penultimate, waiting for the ultimate." (Bonhoeffer, 2005:168).

actual world” (Bonhoeffer, 2005:48). Penultimate reality “demands deeds” and “retains its necessity and its right as long as the earth endures” (Bonhoeffer, 2005:165, 168). Mandates are the only concrete form in which “the practise of the Christian life can be learned” (Bonhoeffer, 2005:68–69). It seems that for every strong statement of participation in Christ, Bonhoeffer adds a qualifying affirmation of human agency. Indeed, he writes of the “*necessity* of free responsible action” and he describes the “existential act of freedom” as a *requirement* of the divine command (Bonhoeffer, 2005:425–426; emphasis added). According to Tödt (1993:5, 6), Bonhoeffer advocates vicarious representative *action* as the “fundamental principle” and “specific content” of life in the Christian community (Tödt, 1993:6).<sup>59</sup> In sum, for Bonhoeffer, passivity with respect to God’s agency involves positive human agency in thought and deed.

Bonhoeffer understands ethics as “the form of Christ taking form in our world”. This is ethics as formation: human beings, the church, taking on the form of Christ. It is a strong restatement of participation in Christ. However, Bonhoeffer (2005:93; emphasis original) qualifies the term ‘formation’ as follows:

... we must understand by ‘formation’ something quite different from what we are accustomed to mean, and in fact the Holy Scripture speaks of formation in a sense that at first sounds quite strange... in all formation it is concerned only with the one form that has overcome the world, the form of Jesus Christ. Formation proceeds only from here. This does not mean that the teachings of Christ or so-called Christian principles should be applied directly to the world in order to form the world according to them. Formation occurs only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ, *by being conformed to the unique form of the one who became human, was crucified, and is risen*. This does not happen as we strive “to become like Jesus,” as we customarily say, but as the form of Jesus Christ himself so works on us that it molds us, conforming our form to Christ’s own (Gal. 4:19). Christ remains the only one who forms. Christian people do not form the world with their ideas. Rather, Christ forms human beings to a form the same as Christ’s own.

Here Bonhoeffer rejects what we customarily understand by “imitation” as striving “to become like Jesus”. Nevertheless, one wonders whether the qualification that he applies to formation is not also true of imitation: that it has a unique meaning in its biblical context. Indeed, could the definition of formation given here itself concur with biblical imitation? Is biblical imitation perhaps a means of formation? Is it perhaps one way that Christ “so works on us that [he] molds us” into

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<sup>59</sup> It is notable that Bonhoeffer accused Barth of “revelation positivism” which in his assessment entailed such a strong divine determination that “human spontaneity, own activity, and maturity” were in jeopardy (Tödt, 1993:32–33). In other words, the essence of Bonhoeffer’s disagreement with Barth was that he did not do enough to give a positive account of real human agency.

conformity with his own form? It appears that Bonhoeffer himself (quoted in Vos, 2017:286) says as much:

Since we have been formed in the image of Christ, we can live following his example. On this basis we are now actually able to do those deeds, and in the simplicity of discipleship to live in the likeness of Christ.

The questions posed here remain to be answered in the course of this paper. Suffice to say that Torrance follows the contours of Bonhoeffer's theological ethics quite closely, with two notable and seemingly related exceptions. First, Bonhoeffer posits the goal of redemption as humanisation rather than divinisation, and, second, he gives a fuller, more positive account of human agency that, at points, draws near to a doctrine of imitation.

### **3.7 Chapter summary and conclusion**

This review of how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in Torrance's relevant sources delivered fairly consistent results.

We began with Torrance's rejection of Platonic mimesis. Our understanding of Torrance's interaction with Plato is complicated by a number of factors. First, Plato's usage of the imitation word group is distributed across his writings on aesthetics, ethics and cosmology. Second, the relation between his usage of the word group in one category (e.g., cosmology) and his usage of the word group in another (e.g., ethics) is not entirely clear. Third, in his ethical writings, Plato himself presented two kinds of imitation – he rejected the negative kind and affirmed the positive kind. These factors make it difficult to discern exactly how Plato understood imitation, and whether Torrance has represented him fairly. That said, in the end, it appears that what Torrance rejects is an ontological monism that issues in a cosmological dualism. The result is an imitation ethic of actualising a pre-existing nature by independent human agency. He finds this brand of imitation prevalent in Neoplatonic thought, where imitation implies a *hypostatic* transcription of a heavenly reality in time, or participation by nature and independent agency. All of this he considers an affront to the biblical account of participation by grace. This analysis of Platonic imitation is important as the first instance of Torrance seeming to be simultaneously in step with his source in rejecting a certain brand of imitation, but out of step with his source in ignoring a more positive brand of imitation.

Athanasius's use of *μίμησις* and *παράδειγμα* to define participation presents a challenge to Torrance's reading of Athanasius and his historical theology at large. The same is true of some of the other Greek fathers. Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril of Alexandria all give a positive account of imitation as an expression of participation, or a means to realise participation. Far from

being antithetical to participation, in the Greek fathers surveyed here, imitation is important to a full understanding of participation.

Calvin also presents imitation and participation as “complementary rather than competing realities” (Agan, 2013:809). Kierkegaard builds on Plato to offer a positive account of imitation and reject negative ‘aping’. Indeed, a positive ‘following after’ Christ is necessary to Kierkegaard’s conception of grace.

Similarly, Barth and Bonhoeffer offer positive and extensive accounts of Christian agency embedded within the reality of divine agency. Both of those accounts occasionally draw on the conceptual architecture of imitation, and even the express language of imitation.

Thus this survey consistently shows Torrance to have a less developed account of Christian agency than his sources. He is also shown to be far more guarded and tentative in his references to imitation than his sources, who often consider imitation *of Christ* necessary to a full account of participation *in Christ*. This raises the question of the adequacy of his account of both imitation and participation. For a full and proper answer, the question requires an analysis of the biblical witness. That is the focus of chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PARTICIPATION, IMITATION AND AGENCY – AN INTEGRATED MODEL

### 4.1 Introduction and method

The objective of this chapter is to present a biblical perspective<sup>60</sup> on how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate. This is with a view to engaging Torrance's model of participation in the final chapter. To that end I have selected a number of exemplary anchor texts, which I will exegete according to the historical-grammatical method.<sup>61</sup> In the main, I have selected texts 1) that are important to either Torrance or Webster in formulating their positions and/or 2) where both participation and imitation are present. In the selection process, my own survey of the Bible was supplemented by my reading of Torrance, his sources, his critics, and some secondary literature on participation and imitation.<sup>62</sup> The fairly wide range of texts that include both participation and imitation is itself part of the evidentiary basis for my conclusions. In what follows, I will exegete each text in an attempt to establish the relationship between participation and imitation, wherever such a relationship exists. I will also pay close attention to agency and make some preliminary remarks on the bearings of these findings on Torrance's model of ontological participation. Finally, I will collate the results of the exegesis in order to determine whether a synthesis is possible – one which contributes to a biblical understanding of participation, imitation and how the two relate as modes of Christian agency.

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<sup>60</sup> Please refer to the limited sense in which I use this phrase, and its bearing on text selection, above (§1.8, footnote 7, p. 15).

<sup>61</sup> Please refer to my rationale for adopting this method above (§1.8, pp. 15–16). I take Michael Gorman's *Elements of biblical exegesis* (2001) to be indicative of the method I adopt here. However, I have tailored the method he outlines to suit the demands of this study. My assumptions and adjustments are as follows. I deal with the biblical canon in its final form and will only comment on text critical issues where they have a direct bearing. I will not enter into any debates over authorship, since these are highly unlikely to have a material impact on my results. Comments pertaining to genre, structure and context will again be limited by their bearing on the specific focus of this study. In my selection of commentaries, I was guided by Evans (2016).

<sup>62</sup> I selected Galatians 2 for its importance to Torrance in making his case for ontological participation, and I selected Philippians 2 for its importance to Webster in making his case for imitation. In the selection of the remaining texts I looked for proximity of the participation and imitation concepts. In the New Testament, in most cases I took the presence of the participation concept to be signalled by the phrase "in Christ". I took the presence of the imitation concept to be signalled by the "imitation", "example" and "pattern" word groups and associated ideas. I did not explicitly focus on the "discipleship" word group and associated ideas, though I do make the case below that they are closely related to the imitation concept.

## 4.2 Exegesis of anchor texts

### 4.2.1 Leviticus 11 and 19–21

#### 4.2.1.1 The text

##### Hebrew (Westminster Leningrad Codex)

<sup>44</sup>כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְהִתְקַדְשֶׁתֶם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי  
קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי

<sup>45</sup>...וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי:

<sup>2</sup>...קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

<sup>7</sup>וְהִתְקַדְשֶׁתֶם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

<sup>8</sup>וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם אֲנִי יְהוָה מְקַדְשְׁכֶם:

<sup>26</sup>וְהִיִּיתֶם לִי קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאַבְדַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִן־  
הָעַמִּים לְהִיּוֹת לִי:

<sup>8</sup>וְקִדְשֵׁתוֹ כִּי־אֶת־לֶחֶם אֱלֹהֵיךָ הוּא מִקְרִיב קֹדֶשׁ יְהִי־לָךְ  
כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה מְקַדְשְׁכֶם:

##### English Standard Version (2016)

<sup>44</sup> For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy... (Lev. 11:44a)

<sup>45</sup> ... You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. (Lev. 11:45b)

<sup>2</sup> ...You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. (Lev. 19:2b).

<sup>7</sup> Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.

<sup>8</sup> Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you. (Lev. 20:7-8)

You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine. (Lev. 20:26)

You shall sanctify him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I, the LORD, who sanctify you, am holy. (Lev. 21:8)

#### 4.2.1.2 Analysis

- *Introduction and context*

The primary focus of Leviticus is the relationship between a Holy God and his people (Hartley, 1992:ivi). Indeed, this is an important theme throughout the wider biblical corpus, and therefore also in biblical theology (Hartley, 1992:ivi). Holiness has been described as the “quintessential nature” of God (Hartley, 1992:ivi; Milgrom, 2000:1712). The relationship between God’s holiness and the holiness of his people is captured in the few verses selected above, which themselves can be paraphrased, “Be holy, for I am Holy”. Wenham (1979:18, 180, 264) calls this the motto of Leviticus. These observations speak to the importance of Leviticus in general and these verses in particular. Collectively they justify this selection as the place to begin our investigation.

- *Exegesis (Leviticus 11)*

The verses above are organised around cognates of the root קדש (ἀγιάζω in the LXX). The first thing to notice is how the agency in sanctification iterates between the divine and the human

according to the form of that root. In Leviticus 11:44 the root is found first as a verb in the reflexive form (hitpael, indicative future passive in the LXX), suggesting human agency, and then as a substantive adjective following the copulative verb: “consecrate yourselves... and be holy”. However, this human agency is couched within statements of divine being and agency. It is preceded and connected by coordinating conjunction to YHWH’s self-identification: “I am the LORD”. It is followed by a construction that Milgrom (2000:1607) describes as a “motive clause”. The motive is the holiness of the LORD. Verse 45 details his agency. He brought Israel up out of Egypt, with the express purpose of relating to them as *their* God. The purpose is relationship. The call to holiness is then repeated, as is the motive of God’s holy being. Milgrom (1991:687; see also Harrison, 1980:135–136) has no hesitation in labelling this a call to *imitatio Dei*. In these verses we see human agency relating to and interacting with divine being and agency. We see early evidence of what could be characterised as an interplay between imitation and participation.<sup>63</sup>

- *Exegesis (Leviticus 19–21)*

Whereas Leviticus 11:44–45 governed food laws and those relating to animal carcasses, Leviticus 19:2 is the banner over laws pertaining to holiness in everyday life. The strong resonance of this chapter with the Decalogue in Exodus 20 is one measure of the importance of holiness in the life of Israel (Hartley, 1992:308–309). It is part of what makes the chapter “central to the entire book” (Milgrom, 2000:1602). The construction of the “be holy for I am holy” formula is almost identical to 11:44. It is noteworthy that in both cases YHWH self-identifies in terms of his people (“the LORD *your* God”). The verb is in the qal imperfect, implying incomplete action, and agency is indeterminate (“You will be holy”). Nevertheless, coming as it does at the head of list of commandments to Israel, the call for Israel to exercise agency in imitation is clearly implied (Milgrom, 2000:1604).

In Leviticus 20:7 the verb form returns to the reflexive hitpael stem, and agency returns to the congregation (“sanctify yourselves”). Nevertheless, this agency is bounded in the very next verse by the piel participle form of the verb, and the agency of YHWH: the One who “sanctifies you” or “makes you holy”.<sup>64</sup> Thus in verse 8 the agency of YHWH is once again in view. Hartley (1992:338) describes the interplay of agency in verses 7–8 as “exercising one’s will to do God’s will”.

In Leviticus 20:26 we have a repetition of the now-familiar formula: qal perfect copulative with the  $\psi\kappa\delta$  root as a substantive adjective. Once again, agency is determined not by the verb form but

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<sup>63</sup> The participation is of a particular kind, to be defined below.

<sup>64</sup> The piel stem is factitive or resultative in meaning, and functions like the hiphil causative: “to make holy” (Waltke & O’Connor, 2004:396–404).

by the context of commandment (see v. 27). Once again, the call to imitation is coupled with divine being and agency in what might be considered participation. Verse 26 ends in a reminder of YHWH's election of Israel by separation from the nations (Kiuchi, 2007:380). The infinitive construct of purpose makes it clear that YHWH chose Israel so that they would be his.

Finally, in Leviticus 21:8 the piel stem delivers a causative meaning: "sanctify". The priests are in view, and the congregation is impelled to ensure the holiness of the priests. In the clauses that follow, we discover that the priests will indeed be sanctified because YHWH the "Sanctifier" (piel participle) is Holy.

Throughout these verses we find human agency cast in dynamic relationship with divine agency. We find the call to imitation of God is premised on fellowship with God (what we might, albeit prematurely, call participation). These preliminary findings are bolstered by a closer look at the nature of holiness and the means to holiness in the context of Leviticus.

- *Holiness and agency in Leviticus*

At least three "polarities" (Hartley, 1992:lvii–lxi) appear to recur in discussion regarding the nature of holiness in Leviticus: exclusion–inclusion, defective–whole, death–life. Scholars have identified that holiness in Leviticus refers to the separation of Israel from the nations (e.g., Wenham, 1979:280). That separation implies exclusion, but also inclusion, since God's holiness moves him to sanctify a people other than himself for himself, and Israel's holiness is in part for the sake of the nations (Hartley, 1992:lxi, lxiii, 312). Notice Milgrom's choice of language as he draws on Buber to frame this idea (2000:1604-1605; emphasis mine):

This dual obligation of both withdrawal and *participation* inherent in the nature of the deity was fully captured by Buber (1964: 96): 'God is the absolute authority over the world because he is separated from it and transcends it but He is not withdrawn from it. Israel, in *imitating* God by being a holy nation, similarly must not withdraw from the world of the nations but rather radiate a positive influence on them through every aspect of Jewish living.'

The call to holiness is also a call to wholeness or integrity in the physical order as a symbol of wholeness and integrity in the moral order (Wenham, 1979:184). Finally, the call to holiness is the call to choose life over death (Milgrom, 1991:46–47; 2000:1722–1723).

With that in place we move to reflect on the means of holiness in Leviticus. It is worth noting with Hartley (1992:lvii) that "Because only YHWH is intrinsically holy, any person or thing is holy only as it stands in relationship to him." The question of agency in God's holiness is loaded – God's holiness is ontological. But what of agency in the holiness of Israel? We very soon discover the

tension in how commentators read the text. Milgrom (1991:730; 2000:1721) can assert both that “Holiness is the extension of [God’s] nature; ... the agency of his will”, and also that “Israelites... are sanctified by virtue of their own effort”. Moreover, holiness is a “divine gift” (Milgrom, 2000:1741). This tension emerges from a differentiation between divine and human holiness in the text. The two are related analogically rather than univocally. This qualitative difference in holiness was meticulously acknowledged by the Masoretes. Wherever the word “holy” refers to God they gave it the *plene* pointing; wherever it refers to man they gave it the defective pointing (Milgrom, 2000:1606). Kiuchi (2007:42–43) describes the differentiated holiness in Leviticus in terms of outer and inner holiness. Outer holiness is the practical and symbolic dimension of the spiritual reality of inner holiness. Outer holiness is meaningless on its own; instead, it draws meaning from and signifies inner holiness, which is a unilateral work of God. Milgrom (1991:730; emphasis mine) attempts to articulate the tension inherent in differentiated holiness as follows:

That which man is not, nor can ever fully be, but that which man is commanded to emulate and approximate, is what the Bible calls... ‘holy’. Holiness means *imitatio Dei* – the life of godliness.

Thus Israel are called to exercise agency in approximating the communicable attributes of God’s holiness. In Leviticus these include prohibitive (separation from) and performative (separation to) dimensions (Milgrom, 2000:1604–1605). The goal of Israel’s imitation of YHWH’s holiness is “perpetual admission into the presence... of God” (Milgrom, 2000:1606). That sounds close to the language of participation. Thus we might conclude that imitation serves participation. However, Leviticus cautions that “on the one hand, Israel should strive to imitate God, but, on the other hand, it should be fully aware of the *unbridgeable gap* between them” (Milgrom, 2000:1605; emphasis mine). Thus, on this reading, imitation towards participation in Leviticus cannot imply theosis.

#### **4.2.1.3 Summary and conclusion**

In sum, in Leviticus the means of Israelite holiness is the exercise of human agency in dependent and derivative relation with divine agency. Hartley (1992:ix) refers to that relation as “reciprocal”, but that word does not seem to do enough to stress the primacy of divine agency in these verses. What we have seen is that participation necessitates imitation (e.g., Lev. 11:44), and imitation serves participation (e.g., Lev. 20:26).

## 4.2.2 Deuteronomy 10:12–22

### 4.2.2.1 The text

#### Hebrew (Westminster Leningrad Codex)

<sup>12</sup> ועתה ישראל מה יהוה אלהיך שאל מעמך כי אם-  
ליראה את יהוה אלהיך ללכת בכל דרכיו ולא הבה אתו  
ולעבד את יהוה אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך:  
<sup>13</sup> ולשמר את מצוות יהוה ואת חקתיו אשר אנכי מצוה  
היום לטוב לך:  
<sup>14</sup> הן ליהוה אלהיך השמים ושמי השמים הארץ וכל-  
אשר בה:  
<sup>15</sup> רק באבתך חשק יהוה לאהבה אותם ויבחר בזרעם  
אחריהם בכם מפלה עמים כיום הזה:  
<sup>16</sup> ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם וערפכם לא תקשו עוד:  
<sup>17</sup> כי יהוה אלהיכם הוא אלהי האלהים ואדני האדנים  
האל הגדל הגבר והנורא אשר לא ישא פנים ולא יקח  
שחד:  
<sup>18</sup> עשה משפט יתום ואלמנה ואהב גר לתת לו לחם  
ושמלה:  
<sup>19</sup> ואהבתם את הגר כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים:

#### English Standard Version (2016)

<sup>12</sup> And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,  
<sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?  
<sup>14</sup> Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.  
<sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.  
<sup>16</sup> Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.  
<sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.  
<sup>18</sup> He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.  
<sup>19</sup> Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. (Deut. 10:12–19)

### 4.2.2.2 Analysis

- *Introduction and context*

Milgrom (2000:1605) points to these verses as an exposition of *imitatio Dei* in Leviticus 19:2. Lundbom (2013:389) sees in them a “summary of Deuteronomic theology”. Wright (1996:144) describes this unit as “unquestionably one of the richest texts in the Hebrew Bible... [that] purposely tries to ‘boil down’ the whole theological and ethical content of the book [Deuteronomy]”. Given the intertextual and theological reach of Deuteronomy into the rest of the biblical corpus, we are once again dealing with a passage of great significance to Old Testament and biblical theology.

This passage is located within the second of Moses’ sermons on the plains of Moab to a new generation of Israelites who are about to enter the land, in what Thompson (1974:19) calls “the heart of the book”. Or if we consider the ANE treaty as an organising motif, this section is located within the *basic stipulations* of the treaty (Thompson, 1974:24). In content, the section offers a summary of themes already explored, and a transition into the law corpus proper (McConville,

2002:197). Verses 12–22 are unified by the call to devotion to YHWH in its various dimensions (McConville, 2002:198).

- *Exegesis*

Our particular interest is in a phrase that comes in the opening verse, verse 12. The response to the rhetorical question, “What does the LORD your God require of you?” is presented in terms familiar to Deuteronomy. The “interior dispositions” (Lundbom, 2013:70) of fear and love for YHWH are both present. In verse 12 they couch our phrase of interest: “to walk in all his ways”. Lundbom (2013:71) asserts that this phrase captures the whole of life for individual and nation. It “includes the interior dispositions of love and fear” but also extends to external conduct. Wright (1996:145) casts it explicitly in terms of *imitatio Dei*:

To walk in all his ways, as the imitation of God, is perhaps the phrase in the Hebrew Bible that most nearly summarizes what we mean by ‘Old Testament ethics’.

This conclusion has support in verses that follow. Firstly, notwithstanding a strong statement of the sovereignty of God in the election of Israel (vv. 14–15), there is a summons to human agency in verse 16, perhaps where we would least expect it: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn”. The use of the verb in the hiphil stem (second person plural), with its implication of causative action (Joüon & Muraoka, 2006:148), makes it clear that some form of agency resides with Israel. The interior disposition described by the idiom of heart and neck<sup>65</sup> is considered by many (almost certainly by Torrance) to be off limits to human agency. But here the text is plain: agency is with Israel. Of course, it is an agency qualified by verses 14–15, 17, and the surrounding context, but it nevertheless supports Wright’s introduction of the imitation idea.<sup>66</sup>

There is further support for *imitatio Dei* in verse 19a, which calls Israel to love the sojourner, on the basis of YHWH’s love for the sojourner in general (v. 18), and of YHWH’s love for Israel the sojourner, in particular (v. 19b). Wright (1996:149) considers YHWH’s love for Israel the sojourner “typical of him”. He adds that “[YHWH’s] action for Israel was paradigmatic *for them*, but it was also paradigmatic *of God*” (Wright, 1996:150; emphasis original). He characterises the call of verse 19a as an explication of what it means for Israel “to walk in his ways”, but one that is “totally rooted in the character and action of God” (Wright, 1996:150). If Wright is correct, it is fair to

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<sup>65</sup> In verse 16 the idiomatic injunction against hardening or stiffening the neck is conveyed in the ESV by the words “be no longer stubborn”.

<sup>66</sup> He considers the call in v. 16 to be a call to repentance (Wright, 1996:147).

conclude that the imitation and the human agency exhorted in these verses is “totally rooted in the character and action” (or being and agency) of God.

Other scholars do not use the language of imitation directly, but appear to endorse the same underlying meaning expressed above. Thompson (1974:87; emphasis mine), speaks of Israel chosen to be YHWH’s “vassal and to act as *his agent*”.<sup>67</sup> McConville (2002:201) describes it in terms of the extension of royal responsibility. In these articulations, there is at least some conceptual overlap with Wright. Moreover, in ascribing the *imitatio Dei* to these verses, Wright is no innovator. The renowned twelfth-century Jewish scholar Maimonides wrote in his interpretation of Deuteronomy that to walk in his ways is “to resemble Him... to the extent of our capacity” (quoted in Kreisel, 1994:176).

#### **4.2.2.3 Summary and conclusion**

In an important book, in an important section, we find an important phrase that some consider the essence of Israel’s ethical programme. “Walk in his ways” can credibly be interpreted to mean “imitate God to the extent of your capacity”. However, the text itself has strong qualifications of what that imitation might mean, and what the nature of any possible human agency would be. This is an imitation and an agency “totally rooted” in the being and agency of God. That said, in the exegesis of Deuteronomy 10:12–22 there is a plausible case for the conclusion that participation requires imitation. The full force and meaning of these passages and the themes they convey are realised only when they are placed in the wider context of biblical theology. That is to say, we need to consider how they are fulfilled in Christ and effected by the Holy Spirit. We turn now to the New Testament to explore these questions.

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<sup>67</sup> The phrase “his agent” is a remarkably succinct expression of the integration of divine and human agency, and the integration of participation and imitation.

## 4.2.3 1 Corinthians

### 4.2.3.1 The text

#### Nestle–Aland (2012)

<sup>14</sup> Οὐκ ἐντρέπων ὑμᾶς γράφω ταῦτα ἀλλ' ὡς τέκνα μου ἀγαπητὰ νουθετῶ[ν].

<sup>15</sup> ἐὰν γὰρ μυρίους παιδαγωγούς ἔχητε ἐν Χριστῷ ἀλλ' οὐ πολλοὺς πατέρας· ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς ἐγέννησα.

<sup>16</sup> Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε.

<sup>17</sup> Διὰ τοῦτο ἔπεμψα ὑμῖν Τιμόθεον, ὅς ἐστίν μου τέκνον ἀγαπητὸν καὶ πιστὸν ἐν κυρίῳ, ὃς ὑμᾶς ἀναμνήσει τὰς ὁδοὺς μου τὰς ἐν Χριστῷ [Ἰησοῦ], καθὼς πανταχοῦ ἐν πάσῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ διδάσκω.

<sup>16</sup> Τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστίν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστίν;

<sup>17</sup> ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἐν σῶμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἐσμεν, οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν.

<sup>33</sup> καθὼς καὶ γὰρ πάντα πᾶσιν ἀρέσκω μὴ ζητῶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σύμφορον ἀλλὰ τὸ τῶν πολλῶν, ἵνα σωθῶσιν.

**11:1** μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε καθὼς καὶ γὰρ Χριστοῦ.

#### English Standard Version (2016)

<sup>14</sup> I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

<sup>15</sup> For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

<sup>16</sup> I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

<sup>17</sup> That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. (1 Cor. 4:14–17)

<sup>16</sup> The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

<sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Cor. 10:16–17)

<sup>33</sup> just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

**11:1** Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Cor. 10:33–11:1)

### 4.2.3.2 Analysis

- *Introduction and context*

We move now to the New Testament, without fully departing from the Old. Ciampa and Rosner (2010:28) describe Deuteronomy as one of two Old Testament books from which Paul seems to have taken his cue in writing 1 Corinthians.<sup>68</sup> The letter has a distinctly ethical tone. Paul writes in response to letters and oral reports from the Corinthian church in order to deal with their failure to grasp the implications of the gospel for Christian conduct (Garland, 2003:21, 148). Stated positively, the goal of the letter is to “get the Corinthians to come to terms, mentally, spiritually, and ethically” with the advent of the eschaton in Christ (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010:34). We see this focus play out in the verses that are of interest.

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<sup>68</sup> The other is Isaiah.

- *Exegesis (1 Corinthians 4)*

First Corinthians 4:14–17 marks the end of the first section of the letter dealing with Corinthian factionalism (1:10–4:21; Garland, 2003:21, 144). Paul’s message in those opening four chapters “can be summarized in the command: *imitate me*” (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010:187; emphasis original). But before we come to that command in verse 16, we need to take special note of its context. In verse 14 we find that Paul’s intent in writing these chapters is governed by the identity of his recipients and his relationship with them. They are his beloved children. The relationship is filial. In verse 15b we discover how that relationship came about. Paul *fathered* (γεννάω; Danker, 2009:q.v.) them. Two prepositional phrases modify that verb (Leedy, 2006:ad loc.). The second of the two is “through the gospel” – this describes the means of this relationship (Wallace, 1996:376); that is, Paul became their father *by means of* the gospel. The first prepositional phrase is “in Christ”. This is a notoriously contested and difficult phrase to define (Wallace, 1996:375n58), but given the context of spiritual birth, it seems highly probable that it refers to spiritual union with Christ (Thiselton, 2000:370). *In Christ* can express “instrumentality or mode of action as well as locality”, all in order to convey Christ’s being and agency in God’s saving purposes (Seifrid, 1993:433).

The NASB is helpful in its translation of verse 15b since it stays close to the original word order: “for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” *In Christ* – the three dimensions of locality, instrumentality and modality are all at play, but since *in Christ* modifies Paul’s fathering of the Corinthians, it seems to be stressing “the manner in which an action occurs” (Seifrid, 1993:433). Therefore, in verse 15b Christ’s agency in bringing new birth and Paul’s agency in preaching the gospel are both in view. That said, in the wider section, references to the being and agency of Christ are so commonplace as almost to fall from view. The phrases “in Christ” or “in the Lord” appear four times in as many verses. In verses 14–17 the discussion of the agency of Paul, Timothy and the Corinthians is punctuated by the agency of Christ. Union with Christ, being *in Christ*, is the context (“the sphere”; Seifrid, 1993:434) in which the call to imitation takes place.

Paul’s filial relationship with the Corinthians, grounded in their mutual union with Christ, is connected by a coordinating conjunction to verse 16: “*Therefore* I urge you to imitate me” (HCSB; emphasis mine). This inferential conjunction plays the role it so often plays in Paul’s letters, the pivot between the indicative and the imperative (Wallace, 1996:673). The use of the verb “become” signals “habitual action”, or the long-term exercise of agency towards maturity (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:356; cf. Hartley’s comments on Lev. 19:2, 1992:31). The Corinthians are to take “habitual action” to conform their lives to the pattern of Paul’s life, insofar as he has conformed to the wisdom of the cross and the pattern of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Ciampa & Rosner, 2010:188).

This initial understanding of imitation is deepened by verse 17. In order to facilitate imitation (“*For this reason...*”; NASB), Paul is sending Timothy. Paul has the same filial relationship with Timothy as he does with the Corinthians, since both relationships are *in the Lord*. Timothy’s faithfulness *in the Lord* is what qualifies him to model Paul to the Corinthians. As an exemplar, Timothy will remind the Corinthians of *Paul’s ways in Christ Jesus*. Paul’s “ways” borrows from the Jewish idiom of walking (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010:189), the rabbinic *halakah*, that we have already encountered in Deuteronomy 10:12 (see 4.2.2 above). It is a rule of conduct based on Scripture<sup>69</sup> (Morris, 1985:83), and here it refers to Paul’s whole pattern of life (Thiselton, 2000:374). But Paul insists on adding a qualifier – it is only his way of life *in Christ* that is worth imitating. In 1 Corinthians 4:14–17 imitation and union with Christ are inseparable.

- *Exegesis (1 Corinthians 10–11)*

Before making a few brief comments on Paul’s closing remark in 1 Corinthians 11:1, we pause at 10:16–17, verses which lead into that particular conclusion. In chapters 8–10 Paul is warning the Corinthians against the dangers of idolatry, particularly in the area of table fellowship. It is noteworthy, considering our discussion of imitation, that he uses himself as an example in 9:1–27. In 10:14–22 Paul uses the Lord’s Supper to illustrate his warning against idolatry (Garland, 2003:22). In verses 16–17 he does so by pointing out the fellowship implications of the Lord’s Supper. The language of participation is strong. *Κοινωνία* in verse 16 has connotations of “close association in shared interest” (Danker, 2009:q.v.). This ‘participation’ is in the blood of Christ and in the body of Christ; that is, the Corinthians have “an interest in the death of Christ” (Barret quoted in Thiselton, 2000:762). Indeed, Barret’s interpretation has support in verse 17, where *μετέχομεν* carries the meaning of sharing in a reward (Danker, 2009:s.v. *μετέχω*). Thus, at the Lord’s Supper the Corinthian celebrants participate in Christ himself and have fellowship with each other in Christ (Garland, 2003:477). Torrance (e.g., 1971:64–66; see 2.2.2.3 above) would likely be entirely comfortable with this characterisation. But there is more to it (Thiselton, 2000:763; emphasis mine):

... the Lord’s Supper entails not only communal participation in a covenant pledge of ‘belonging’ and faithfulness to this bond, but also communal participation in *the actual physical lifestyle and stance toward life* which the blood of Christ as the giving of the self to others instantiates and demands. It signifies identification with Christ in his death as both the source of redemption and *the pattern for life and lifestyle*.

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<sup>69</sup> The relationship of imitation and Scripture is explored further below (see 4.2.8).

How is “the pattern for life and lifestyle” realised in the believer and in the believing community? First Corinthians 11:1, “Become imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (my translation). Participation in its fullness has an ethical dimension that both “instantiates” and then “demands” the imitation of Christ. So Paul calls the Corinthians to put aside their own interests for the sake of others and their salvation as he did, because Christ did so (1 Cor. 10:33–11:1). This is the pattern of which he speaks. It is the cruciform pattern of life which must be imitated.

#### 4.2.3.3 Summary and conclusion

In 1 Corinthians 4:14–17 we discover union with Christ as the environment necessary to the existence of true imitation. In 1 Corinthians 10:16–17 and 11:1 we conversely discover that imitation is necessary to the full realisation of participation.

#### 4.2.4 Galatians 2 and 4

##### 4.2.4.1 The text

###### Nestle–Aland (2012)

<sup>20</sup> ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῆ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ.

<sup>12</sup> Γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ, ὅτι καὶ γὰρ ὡς ὑμεῖς, ἀδελφοί, δέομαι ὑμῶν.

###### English Standard Version (2016)

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

<sup>12</sup> Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. (Gal. 4:12a)

##### 4.2.4.2 Analysis

- *Torrance’s use of Galatians 2*

This passage was chosen primarily for its importance to Torrance.<sup>70</sup> I quote at length here again for the sake of convenience (Torrance, 1992a:98; emphasis mine):

... let me direct you to those striking words of St Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians, 2.20, which give succinct expression to the evangelical truth which we have been trying to clarify. ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith, the *faithfulness* of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.’ This is surely *the insight that we must allow to inform all our human responses to God*, whether they be

<sup>70</sup> See 2.4 above. I deduce the importance of this passage to Torrance from the fact that it gives, in his words (Torrance, 1992a:98), “succinct expression” to how the agency of Christ and the agency of the Christian relate to each other in ontological participation. Indeed, insight gleaned from this passage must “inform all our human responses to God” (Torrance, 1992a:98). It is also the text to which he appeals in answering the critics of his model of agency (Torrance, 1992a:xii).

in faith, conversion and personal decision, worship and prayer, the holy sacraments, or the proclamation of the Gospel: 'I yet not I but Christ'... this applies to the whole of my life *in Christ* and to all my human responses to God, for *in Jesus Christ* they are laid hold of, sanctified and informed by his vicarious life of obedience and response to the Father. They are in fact so *indissolubly united to the life of Jesus Christ* which he lived out among us and which he has offered to the Father, as arising out of our human being and nature, that they are our responses toward the love of the Father poured out upon us through the mediation of the Son and in the unity of his Holy Spirit.

In the introduction to the same book, Torrance (1992a:xii; emphasis original) ascribes the tension between the agency of Christ and the agency of the Christian to divine mystery, relying on Galatians 2:20 once more:

How the 'I' of the human believer and the 'I' of Christ are related to one another, expressed for example in the Pauline statement, 'I, yet not I but Christ', is a miracle of the Spirit, and is ultimately as inexplicable as the miracle of the Virgin Birth of Jesus which for me is the unique God-given pattern of unconditional grace. All through the incarnate life and activity of the Lord Jesus we are shown that '*all of grace*' does not mean '*nothing of man*', but precisely the opposite: all of grace means all of man, for the fullness of grace creatively includes the fullness and completeness of our human response in the equation. But this is not something that can be understood logically, for logically 'all of grace' would mean 'nothing of man', which may tempt people to apportion the role of Christ and of the believer by arguing for 'something of grace' and 'something of man', something done for me by Christ and something I do for myself. All of grace means all of man!

Webster's (1986a:316–317; emphasis mine) discomfort with this view is captured in his critique of Berkouwer:

Dutch theologian G. C. Berkouwer so emphasises the antecedent grace of God that he is led to propose that 'sanctification is not a "process", certainly not a moral process, but it is being holy in Christ and having part, through faith, in his righteousness. *The imperative in Paul is identical with: Believe!*' Such a definition fails to persuade because it is, in the end, idealist: it does not lodge the moral life in the continuities of human historical existence. Indeed, it is hard to know whether there is here any human subject to which 'being holy' could be attributed, any self with extension or persistence beyond the discrete occasion.

- *Context*

What can close analysis of Galatians 2:20 and its context add? It is plain why Torrance chose to argue out of this text – Galatians 2:15–21 contains the "central thesis" and "hermeneutical key" in a letter that is foundational to an understanding of the New Testament (Schreiner, 2010:150–151; also Moo, 2013:153). In the letter, Paul is contending with Christian-Jewish missionaries to Galatia who were "correcting" the gospel by claiming that Gentile Christians must "complete" their

conversion through circumcision into the Law of Moses (Dunn quoted in Moo, 2013:20; Longenecker, 1990:89). In meeting his opponents on this presenting issue, Paul is equally concerned to preserve and clarify the ethical implications of the gospel. As Jewett (quoted in Longenecker, 1990:186) puts it, “Paul viewed the congregation as an homogenous unit capable of being swayed this way or that... [They] were as susceptible to the propaganda of the agitators as to the lures of libertinism”.

- *Exegesis (Galatians 2)*

We come now to consider the particulars of chapter 2 verses 15–21. This section follows immediately off the back of “the Antioch incident”, in which Paul describes his confrontation with Peter over Peter’s violation of the truth of the gospel. It is in response to the description of that incident that Paul delivers his *propositio* (a summary of arguments; Longenecker, 1990:82) or his “central rhetorical point” (a positive articulation of the truth of the gospel; Moo, 2013:153). Again, we can see why the passage was so important to Torrance. It is important to others as well. Moo (2013:155) describes it as “contested territory in the old and ongoing debate about participatory and forensic categories in Paul’s theology”. Schreiner (2010:163) speaks of controversy upon controversy in these verses. Without necessarily deciding on all of the issues, exploring some of them will have an important bearing on our discussion of participation, imitation and agency.

In verse 15 Paul addresses Peter and reminds him of their common status under the old covenant. Nevertheless (v. 16), they now share the conviction that a person is not justified by “works of the law”. This is the first contested phrase of relevance to this discussion. Part of the controversy is whether the emphasis should be placed on *works* or on *law*. Traditional Protestant interpretation has focussed on the former, stressing that the problem in view is independent human agency. The New Perspective on Paul has focussed on the latter, stressing that the problem in view is using the law as a means of ethnic demarcation to exclude Gentiles from the New Covenant. After reviewing the use of both concepts in the wider Pauline corpus, Moo (2013:176) sides with the traditional interpretation and concludes, “The problem with ‘works of the law’ is not just that they are bound to a law that kept Gentiles out..., but also that they are works.” He then argues that the same interpretation holds in Galatians 2:16. The problem is independent human agency. Torrance (e.g., 1992a:xii) would surely agree.

- *Galatians 2:16: subjective or objective genitive?*

The next phrase introduces the next controversy: “... we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through *faith in Jesus Christ*.” The controversy surrounds how the genitive phrase πίστewς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ should be translated. Is Jesus Christ the subject of the noun “faith” (i.e., Jesus Christ’s faithfulness), or its object (i.e., faith in Jesus Christ)? Of course, the

decision determines which agency is directly in view (Christ, subjective genitive; or Christian, objective genitive). The arguments in both directions are too many and too complex to rehearse here. I shall only highlight those I consider decisive.

Part of the reason for the controversy is the paucity of data. There are few New Testament examples of faith as a verbal noun followed by a personal genitive (Wallace, 1996:116). Wallace (1996:115) attempts to engage with the grammatical arguments. Despite his intention, he cannot keep from making the following *theological* remarks (Wallace, 1996:116):

Practically speaking, if the subjective gen. view is correct, these texts... argue against 'an implicitly docetic Christology.' Further, the faith/faithfulness of Christ is not a denial of faith in Christ as a Pauline concept (for the idea is expressed in many of the same contexts, only with the verb πιστεύω rather than the noun), but implies that the object of faith is a worthy object, for he himself is faithful.

Wallace (1996:116) concludes that the grammatical evidence is inconclusive, but nevertheless sides with the subjective genitive, and then leaves the matter to be decided on theological grounds. His own theological comments are merely arguments for mitigation. Rather than making the case for the subjective genitive, he merely asserts that the theological consequences of a subjective genitive are acceptable. But the same can easily be argued for the objective genitive. If the objective view is correct, these texts argue against an implicitly docetic Christian agency. Further, faith in Christ does not deny the faithfulness of Christ as a Pauline concept, but implies it. Indeed, these arguments are made by proponents of the objective genitive. Riches (quoted in Moo, 2013:42n45) lays the docetic charge at the door of the subjective genitive: "such a view seems to be in danger of voiding the human reception of... salvific action of any substance at all." Both Moo (2013:42) and Schreiner (2010:165–166) point out that 'faith in Christ' does not exclude the 'faithfulness of Christ', but rather, 'faith in Christ' is faith in the Faithful One. In fact, there is a slight asymmetry here. Where we are dealing exclusively with the verbal noun followed by a personal genitive construction, the objective genitive can include the concept of Christ's faithfulness,<sup>71</sup> whereas the subjective genitive must rely on the verb to preserve the idea of 'faith in Christ'. That said, arguments for mitigation cannot carry the day.

Arguments from alternative constructions that connect Christ with faith are more compelling. As for alternative prepositional constructions, there is not a single instance in the twelve occurrences where faith is exercised by Christ (Moo, 2013:45). As for verbal constructions, there are fifty

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<sup>71</sup> Thanks to Professor Gerald Bray for pointing this out to me (Bray, 2018).

instances in the Pauline corpus, and all of them refer to ordinary believers as the subject of faith (Moo, 2013:45).

Finally, there is the argument from the syntactical construction of Galatians 2:16 itself. Occam's razor supports a reading where the agency of the verbal nouns (our faith in Christ) is in concord with the agency of the verb (we have believed in Christ Jesus). All other things being equal, that is the simplest reading. The argument against it is redundancy: the verbal nouns are redundant if read in agreement with the verb. However, redundancy can be read as emphasis, and in a verse where the assertion "no-one is justified by the law" is repeated three times, emphasis on Christian faith in Christ seems the more likely. If we read the verbal nouns as objective genitives, then the three negative statements ("no-one is justified by law") are matched by three positive statements ("we are justified by faith"). The objective genitive serves the symmetry in Paul's logic. The subjective genitive would serve only to confuse it. That conclusion is bolstered when one considers that the Galatians would have encountered the content of this letter by hearing it being read aloud (Schreiner, 2010:166–167).

For these reasons, I believe that in Galatians 2:16 the objective genitive is more likely. Torrance (1992a:98) unsurprisingly opts for the subjective genitive. Longenecker (1990:87) holds to the same and cites Torrance as a proponent of the subjective genitive position. Longenecker (1990:85) also, like Torrance, views participation as the controlling concept in Galatians 2:15–21. Now is the time for mitigation: as Wallace pointed out, the presence of the verb means that even if we were to adopt Torrance's position, which is by no means obligatory, it would not preclude human agency in believing, and would not necessarily lead to the strength or particular formulation of the conclusions Torrance draws above.

- *Exegesis continued (Galatians 2:17ff)*

In verse 17 Paul begins to explore the ethical implications of the righteousness that comes by faith in Christ. He raises the possible implication of Christ's responsibility for licentiousness, which he immediately rejects out of hand. He argues, on the contrary, that going back to life under the law would propagate sin (v. 18). Verse 19 introduces the idea of participation in Christ. The law was designed to reach its terminus in the death and resurrection of Christ (Longenecker, 1990:91). Thus, through his spiritual union with Christ, Paul can legitimately assert that through the law he (Paul) died to the law, that he might live to God. The concept is developed further in the first phrase of verse 20: "the σύν prefix of the verb συνσταύρωμαι highlights the believer's *participation* with Christ in his crucifixion" (Longenecker, 1990:92; emphasis mine). In "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me", Longenecker (1990:92) sees the death of the ego. And yet, even as Longenecker turns to consider the mystical implications of participation suggested

by the “Christ is in me, I am in Christ” formulations, he is careful to preserve Christian being and agency (Longenecker, 1990:92–93; cf. Schreiner, 2010:172–173):

Mysticism, of course, frequently conjures up ideas about the negation of personality, withdrawal from objective reality, ascetic contemplation, a searching out of pathways to perfection, and absorption into the divine – all of which is true for Eastern and Grecian forms of mysticism. The mysticism of the Bible, however, affirms the true personhood of people and all that God has created in the natural world, never calling for negation or withdrawal except where God’s creation has been contaminated by sin. Furthermore, the mysticism of biblical religion is not some esoteric searching for a path to be followed that will result in union with the divine, but is always of the nature of a response to God’s grace wherein people who have been mercifully touched by God enter into communion with him without ever losing their own identities.

Here we have a scholar who stands with Torrance in viewing participation as the controlling theme of Galatians 2:15–20, and therefore with him in opting for the subjective genitive. Yet he also affirms human agency and rejects the idea of theosis, at least in its stronger versions. That is to say, Torrance’s theological conclusions do not necessarily follow in the form he presents them, even if we allow for his reading of Galatians 2:20.

Paul goes on to assert that there is now a life to be lived “in the flesh” (“in the body”, ESV). But it is a life to be lived “by faith in Son of God”. The same arguments for the objective genitive apply here, *contra* Torrance. Verse 20 closes with a statement of Christ’s vicarious agency. This does not argue for a subjective reading, since the genitive phrase stands at the centre of Christian agency on one hand and the agency of Christ on the other. It must be decided on the wider considerations described above. In verse 21, Paul concludes his argument with a strong affirmation of grace and a denunciation of the enervating implications of a return to the law.

There is a final piece of evidence to consider. Betz (quoted in Moo, 2013:170; emphasis added) comments that the life lived to God encompasses both “soteriology *as well as ethics*”. Moo (2013:155; emphasis mine) argues that “what Jewish-Christians need to do is *imitate* Paul, who, in order truly to live for God, has replaced his attachment to the law with an attachment to Christ (vv. 19–20).” Indeed, that is what Paul himself calls for.

- *Exegesis (Galatians 4)*

Galatians 4:12 opens with “*Τίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ...*” We have already encountered this verb (“become”) in 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1. There it was coupled with the plural noun “imitators”, as in “Become imitators”. In fact, “imitator(s)” appears in the noun form six times in the Pauline corpus,

and in every single instance it is governed by a form of the verb “become”.<sup>72</sup> In two instances, that verb is in the indicative.<sup>73</sup> In every other instance it is in the imperative, as it is here in Galatians 4:12. Thus, is it highly probable that when Paul says, “Γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ...” the verb signals the concept of imitation, and, as we have seen, carries connotations of “habitual action” (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:356). Paul is calling the Gentiles to imitate him in abandoning the law as a means to righteousness (Moo, 2013:281). In other words, he is calling them to replace their “attachment to the law with an attachment to Christ (vv. 19–20)” (Moo, 2013:155). Therefore, we can conclude that Paul’s call to imitation is one that serves participation. Moreover, the call to imitation is not incidental. It is central to a letter in which the theme of participation in the agency of Christ is so strong (Longenecker, 1990:188):

Standing at the head of this section and epitomizing all that Paul wants to say in these verses is the first imperative of Galatians, which in effect is also the operative appeal of the entire letter: “become like me!” (4:12).

#### **4.2.4.3 Summary and conclusion**

Galatians 2:20 is an important text for Torrance. He uses it to capture how the agency of the Christian relates to the agency of Christ. This relation, he argues, is not a logical relation; it is shrouded in mystery. Galatians 2:20 merely presents the truth of participation in Christ – that his human response becomes ours, and ours his. But because this is not a logical relation, all of grace does not mean nothing of man.

Whatever differences we may have with Torrance’s exegetical treatment of the passage and its context (and there are some significant differences), even those who go along with his exegesis do not necessarily arrive at his theological extrapolations. Perhaps the biggest weakness in both his exegesis and his theology at this point is to ignore the “I” in “I, yet not I” and to overlook Paul’s call to imitation. All of grace is all of man. And that is precisely why an account of human agency in general, and of imitation in particular, is necessary to a full-blown account of participation. At least, it seems Paul argued in that direction.

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<sup>72</sup> 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14.

<sup>73</sup> Both in 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14).

## 4.2.5 Ephesians 4 and 5

### 4.2.5.1 The text

#### Nestle–Aland (2012)

4:1 Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ ὁ δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε,

<sup>17</sup> Τοῦτο οὖν λέγω καὶ μαρτύρομαι ἐν κυρίῳ, μηκέτι ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν, καθὼς καὶ τὰ ἔθνη περιπατεῖ ἐν ματαιότητι τοῦ νοδὸς αὐτῶν

<sup>24</sup> καὶ ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὁσιότητι τῆς ἀληθείας.

<sup>32</sup> γίνεσθε [δὲ] εἰς ἀλλήλους χρηστοί, εὐσπλαγχοί, χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς, καθὼς καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν Χριστῷ ἐχαρίσατο ὑμῖν.

5:1 Γίνεσθε οὖν μιμηταὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς τέκνα ἀγαπητὰ

<sup>2</sup> καὶ περιπατεῖτε ἐν ἀγάπῃ, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς καὶ παρέδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν προσφορὰν καὶ θυσίαν τῷ θεῷ εἰς ὁσμὴν εὐωδίας.

<sup>7</sup> μὴ οὖν γίνεσθε συμμέτοχοι αὐτῶν· <sup>8</sup> ἦτε γὰρ ποτε σκότος, νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ· ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατεῖτε

#### English Standard Version (2016)

4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (Eph. 4:1)

<sup>17</sup> Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. (Eph. 4:17)

<sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:24)

<sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

<sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 4:32–5:2)

<sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (Eph. 5:7–8)

### 4.2.5.2 Analysis

- *Introduction and context*

Paul wrote Ephesians as a circular letter, probably for the churches in western Asia Minor, with the purpose of identity formation (O'Brien, 1999:56–57). His central message was “cosmic reconciliation and unity in Christ” (O'Brien, 1999:58). Chapters 1–3 are a description of that identity and how the Ephesians came to share in it through participation in Christ. Chapters 4–6 are an exhortation to transformation on the basis of that identity (Arnold, 2010:226).

- *Exegesis (Ephesians 4:1–24)*

The opening exhortation in Ephesians 4:1 stands as a topic sentence over chapters 4–6 (O'Brien, 1999:273). It is connected by the inferential conjunction *therefore* to the first half of the book and as such it is grounded in Christian identity (Arnold, 2010:228). Paul makes the exhortation as a prisoner ἐν κυρίῳ, which takes its usual connotation in Ephesians, namely, union with Christ

(Arnold, 2010:229). In Christ and under his lordship, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to walk. “Walking” is a metaphor he uses repeatedly in this section of the letter to make his appeal to a certain way of life (Eph. 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). As we have seen, it is a metaphor he draws from the Old Testament, and it refers to conduct in every area of life. It thus denotes human agency of some sort and, as the analysis of Deuteronomy 10 above made clear, it also denotes imitation.

The exhortation is to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”. Calling is an idea closely associated with election in the Pauline corpus (e.g., Rom. 8:30), and so God’s agency in drawing humanity into participation in the blessings of union with Christ is in view (Arnold, 2010:229; O’Brien, 1999:275). It seems what we have in Ephesians 4:1 is an exhortation to a human agency worthy (within its limits) of divine agency, an imitation worthy of participation. This interplay continues in verses 2–6. O’Brien (1999:275–277) makes the case that the call to humility, gentleness, patience and love in verse 2 is in fact a call to “the graces that were seen in perfection in Christ”. Indeed, “the pattern or model is Jesus” (O’Brien, 1999:277), and so Paul is calling for imitation for the sake of unity. But, as verses 3–6 go on to emphasise, it is a call made with divine being and agency clearly in the foreground.

Ephesians 4:7–16 continues the call to unity. For our purposes verse 13 is of interest. It proclaims Christ as the measure of maturity or fullness. It reminds us that conformity to Christ is the goal of Christian transformation (Arnold, 2010:276; cf. Gorman, 2015:80, quoted in chapter 1 above). The question before us is how Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, defines the means of transformation.

In chapter 4 verse 17, Paul reiterates the call of verse 1. He states it in somewhat stronger terms, this time ‘testifying’ or ‘insisting’ in the Lord. Scholars commonly see *in the Lord* here referring to the authority Paul derives from Christ (e.g., Thielman, 2010:296), but it is certainly not an authority that can be divorced from his union with Christ. Indeed, it is only on the basis of *their* participation in Christ that Paul can insist that these Gentiles no longer walk as Gentiles (Thielman, 2010:296). They are members of Christ (4:15–16). Thus, the concept of participation is present. The concept of imitation is also present. First, there is the repeated reference to walking as a way of life, which we have explored above. Secondly, this is one of six uses of the *καθὼς καί* construction in Ephesians, all of which occur in the “ethical” chapters, 4 and 5. According to Arnold (2010:310) and O’Brien (1999:354), the construction can carry causal and/or comparative force. The latter appears to be in view here and suggests the idea of imitation, that is, “do not imitate the Gentile

way of life”.<sup>74</sup> The Ephesians must be who they are. In short, participation is the basis of imitation and participation demands imitation.

In verse 20, participation and imitation are once again both present. Here Paul reminds the Ephesians that “you did not learn [ἐμάθετε] Christ like this”. Ἐμάθετε is cognate to the noun μαθητής, disciple. It therefore carries connotations of following after, modelling – imitation. However, since the truth resides in the person of Jesus (v. 21) and not just in his example, the idea of participation is also present (Talbert, 2007:123).

Verse 24 is the climax of this section, where Paul reminds his listeners that the new man has been created κατὰ Θεόν. The equivalent phrase in Colossians 3:10 makes explicit reference to the “image of its creator” (Foulkes, 1989:137). However, the particular formulation in Ephesians 4:24 prompts Thielman (2010:295) to translate it “after the pattern of God”, even though he adopts the image of God as the implied meaning. Thus, learning Christ requires putting on the new self that is created “after the pattern of God” or in “the image of God”. Both human agency and divine agency are in view. And so Thielman (2010:309) connects this verse with Paul’s exhortation to imitate God in chapter 5 verse 1. He concludes that reflecting the image of God and imitating God are associated ideas in this part of Ephesians (Thielman, 2010:310).<sup>75</sup>

- *Exegesis (Ephesians 4:25–5:32)*

Ephesians 4:25–5:2 follows on from the previous section almost seamlessly, but the high concentration of imperative verbs and participles sets it apart (Arnold, 2010:295). The imperative mood of the passage has prompted some to draw parallels with Stoic exhortation. However, Arnold (2010:295) notes some significant differences, including the indicative ground of identity in Christ and the exclusion of independent moral effort. Whatever Paul has in mind when he calls for imitation, it is not the latter.

Paul rounds off a string of negative and positive exhortations (vv. 26–31) with verse 32. Verse 32 contains something of an imitation formula: the verb γίνεσθε and the conjunctive construction καθὼς καί. We have already seen above that both are associated with calls to imitation. Given that the verb recurs in the very next verse along with the explicit language of imitation (μιμηταί), the idea of imitation is almost certainly intended in this verse as well (cf. Arnold, 2010:308).

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<sup>74</sup> For a similar usage in John’s letters, see 4.2.11 below.

<sup>75</sup> Louw and Nida (1989:581) have εἰκῶν occupying the same semantic domain with τύπος, namely “Pattern, model, example, and corresponding representation”. Τύπος, as we shall see below (e.g., 4.2.6.2), is a word closely associated with imitation. Discipleship and the “image of God”, as ideas associated with imitation, extend the prevalence of the imitation concept far beyond the occurrences of the specific language (cf. Weima, 2014:97–98, cited in 4.2.7 below).

Γίνεσθε in this context denotes continuous striving or “an ongoing and developing quality” (Arnold, 2010:308; cf. “habitual action” or “a way of life” in Rogers & Rogers, 1998:356, 443). In other words, the agency of the individual Christian in community is very much in view. Similarly, καθὼς καί expresses both “cause and manner”; “motivation and pattern” (Arnold, 2010:309). Believers are called to participate in and imitate God’s forgiveness in Christ. God’s forgiveness in Christ both enables and demands human forgiveness. The notion of imitation is reinforced by the fact that the kindness and the tenderness of heart for which the Ephesians are to “continually strive” are regularly attributed to God in both testaments (Arnold, 2010:308; O’Brien, 1999:351).

These various strands all come together in Ephesians 5:1–2:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The inferential conjunction *therefore* connects verse 1 with the previous verse. The γίνεσθε–καθὼς καί combination from verse 32 is then distributed over the next two verses (γίνεσθε: 5:1; καθὼς καί: 5:2). The participation–imitation balance also carries over into 5:1–2. In 5:1, the imperative to “be imitators” is paired with the ontological designation “as beloved children”, which describes the spiritual blessing of adoption in Christ (Eph. 1:3, 5) and is “the basis on which this demand to be imitators is made” (O’Brien, 1999:352). The basis of imitation is identity, which comes through participation in Christ.

The specific content of the imitation is filled out in Ephesians 5:2. For the third time, we encounter the command to “walk”. As I have noted repeatedly, the metaphor carries connotations of imitation and human agency qualified by the agency of God. Here, in a summary statement that epitomises the exhortation in this section (Arnold, 2010:298; Thielman, 2010:320), the Ephesians are exhorted to imitate God by walking in love. Whereas the plain command in verse 1 was to imitate God, in verse 2 καθὼς καί introduces the exegetical parallel of imitating Christ (Foulkes, 1989:145). The way we imitate the Father’s love is by participating in and following after Jesus’ human example of walking in love. And since the content of his love is the substitutionary sacrifice of himself to the Father on our behalf, it both establishes and demands; it is both the ground and the model of our walk (Arnold, 2010:277; O’Brien, 1999:354). Paul is calling the Ephesians to imitate the love of God in Christ as those who participate in it.

In the next section, Ephesians 5:3–14, we find participation and imitation, human and divine agency, integrated in similar ways. Eight imperatives, including the imperative to walk, provide continuity with what has come before in chapters 4 and 5. The differentiating feature is the introduction of the metaphor “light” (Arnold, 2010:315). But once again we see Paul’s appeal cast

in familiar terms. First, we find that the ground of his exhortation remains identity: the person who does not heed his call “*is an idolater*” (Eph. 5:5; emphasis mine) and therefore has no inheritance in the kingdom of God. As such, in verse 7, Paul urges the Ephesians, “do not become partners [μὴ οὖν γίνεσθε συμμέτοχοι] with them”. As we have seen before, γίνεσθε implies ongoing agency. Συμμέτοχοι “is an emphatic word that implies the fullest possible *participation* in something” (Thielman, 2010:335; cf. Foulkes, 1989:149; emphasis mine). Indeed, we see the word used in Ephesians 3:6 to describe the depth of the union of Jew and Gentile in Christ. When we compare Ephesians 5:7 with 4:17, we discover that in his admonition of the Gentile way of life Paul uses imitation and participation almost interchangeably.<sup>76</sup> The Ephesians must neither imitate the Gentile way of life, nor participate in it. To extrapolate, it seems that to imitate would be to exercise agency towards participation.

To do so would be a denial of identity (Arnold, 2010:327–328). For (5:8) though once “you *were* darkness, now you *are* light in the Lord” (emphasis mine). Moreover, the Ephesians “are light *in the Lord*” (emphasis mine) – identity comes through participation in Christ. Further still, identity must be reflected in agency – since they are light in the Lord, they are to “walk as children of the light” (5:8).<sup>77</sup> The point is underscored by the juxtaposition of “sons of disobedience” in verse 6 and “children of the light” in verse 8. Progeny affects agency. The agency of God determines the agency of his children. They in turn must exercise their agency accordingly.

There is a final piece of evidence to consider. “*Be filled* with the Spirit” in 5:18 stands as a head verb governing a string of participles that follow, up to and including verse 21: “*submitting* to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Leedy, 2006:ad loc.). The latter is itself the thematic and grammatical head governing the relations described in 5:22–6:9 (Foulkes, 1989:157, 159). Of special interest is the relationship between husband and wife, which is supposed to mirror the relation between Christ and the church. The καθὼς καί construction appears in verse 25 and again in verse 29. The comparative force of this construction is certainly in the foreground, though not to the exclusion of the causal force. Husbands are to imitate Christ’s love for the church, which of course makes such love possible in the first place. Verse 25 is a clear echo of 5:2 (“walk in love, just as Christ also loved you”; NASB), where the context was an explicit call to imitation (Fowl, 2012:188). Verse 29 expounds the practical outworking of a husband’s love for his wife as an imitation of Christ’s love for the church. In both verses, and indeed throughout 5:22–33, the Christ–church relation is the “standard”, “model” and “paradigm” for the husband–wife relation (Foulkes, 1989:163; Fowl, 2012:188). Both imply deep spiritual union (vv. 30–33), and the hidden

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<sup>76</sup> Paul’s use of συγκαινωνεῖτε in 5:11 in reference to “works of darkness” underscores this point.

<sup>77</sup> The final exhortation to walk in 5:15 takes a similar structure based on identity: “Look carefully then how you walk, *not as unwise, but as wise*” (emphasis mine). This reinforces the conclusions drawn here.

assumption, perhaps part of the great mystery (v. 32), is that the union of Christ and the church is the ground of its imitation in marriage. In other words, imitation is grounded in participation.

#### 4.2.5.3 Summary and conclusion

In chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians we gain insight into the deep integration of participation and imitation, of divine and human agency. At the macro level of the letter as a whole, the call to action is grounded in the gift of new identity, which establishes the grammar of divine and human agency. The imperative “walk” is interspersed throughout these chapters and functions as the dominant command. It derives from the Old Testament where the idea of imitation is often prominent (“walk in the ways of the LORD”, e.g., Deut. 10:12 above). The Ephesians are called to pattern their lives in a manner befitting God’s agency (e.g., “worthy of the call”, 4:1) or God’s attributes (e.g., kindness and compassion, 4:32). The integration of participation and imitation also comes through in seemingly minor details, such as the conjunctive construction *καθώς καί*. The phrase repeats throughout these chapters and connotes both cause and manner, motivation and pattern, participation and imitation. Another such detail is the repetition of the imperative *γίνεσθε*, which is a call to “continuous striving”, “ongoing development” and “habitual action”, that is, the exercise of agency in imitation towards the goal of deeper participation in God, and away from the alternative (e.g., 4:32 and 5:1 versus 5:7).

Participation and imitation are deeply integrated in these chapters, as are divine and human agency. Divine agency establishes and demands human agency. Divine being and agency are the ground and the model of human being and agency. Participation is the basis of imitation. Imitation is the full expression and ongoing confirmation of participation. In the words of Ephesians 5 verse 1, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”

#### 4.2.6 Philippians 2:5

##### 4.2.6.1 The text

###### Nestle–Aland (2012)

<sup>5</sup> Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,

###### English Standard Version (2016)

<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, (Phil. 2:5)

##### 4.2.6.2 Analysis

- *Webster’s use of Philippians 2*

As with Galatians 2, the explicit language of imitation does not appear in Philippians 2. Nevertheless, I analyse the two passages for similar reasons. Both Torrance and Webster are

seeking to understand the relation of Christ's agency to Christian agency. I analysed Galatians 2:20 (see 4.2.4 above) because of its importance to Torrance in making his case for participation. Here I analyse Philippians 2:5 because of its importance to Webster in making his case for imitation. I have outlined Webster's broader argument for imitation in chapter 2 (see 2.3.4 above). Here I will focus on his use of Philippians 2:5 to make his case.

In many ways Philippians 2:5 is uniquely suited to consideration of our question. On reflection, it is plain to see why Webster chose it. That said, while the verse throws out the relevant questions, it does not give up answers quite as easily.

- *The meaning of Philippians 2:5*

The suitability of verse 5 to the question at hand emerges as follows. In verses 1–4 Paul is exhorting the Philippians to the unity in Christ that comes through humility. In verses 6–11 he presents the Christ hymn. Verse 5 acts as a bridge between those two sections (Hansen, 2009:118). It thus describes the connection between the attitude of the Philippian believers and the attitude of Christ. Determining the nature of that connection depends on the interpretation of verse 5. Is the nature of the connection one of ontological participation, or of imitation? Is Christ's agency emphasised, or is the agency of the Christian? Are the Philippians being called to be like Christ, or to be who they are in Christ? To a significant extent, the answers to those questions depend on the interpretation of verse 5. The problem with the interpretation of verse 5 is the ellipsis of a verb in the second of two parallel clauses. Hansen (2009:119) offers this "literal translation":

"5a) Think this in yourselves  
5b) which also in Christ Jesus."

The choice of verb for clause b divides modern interpreters broadly into two camps. Those who supply the verb "was" offer what is often called the *ethical* interpretation: "Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Hansen, 2009:120). Those who supply the verb "think" offer what is often called the *kerygmatic* interpretation: "Think this way among yourselves which also you think in Christ Jesus" (Hansen, 2009:120). This choice between the two broad interpretive options makes Philippians 2:5 particularly germane to a study of imitation and participation as models of agency.

It is however, by no means a simple choice to make. O'Brien (1991:188) describes the interpretive fog hanging over this part of Philippians 2 as follows:

The paragraph is the most difficult in Philippians to interpret. This is not, however, through lack of secondary literature on vv. 5–11... Little scholarly consensus has emerged in relation to the origin and authorship of the passage (pre-Pauline, Pauline, or post-Pauline?), its form and structure (hymnic? the number of stanzas?), the conceptual background of the passage (OT, Gnostic myth, general Hellenism, wisdom speculation?), or key exegetical and theological issues.

That said, I believe that there is enough that we can say with cogency and confidence for this verse to contribute to the weight of evidence being accumulated in this study.

Webster critiques Käsemann as the exemplar of the kerygmatic interpretation. The balance of Webster's arguments against the latter are theological – drawn from the wider Pauline corpus and the Bible at large. For example, Webster (1986b:108) argues that on Käsemann's interpretation of verse 5, the division between Paul's exhortation (vv. 1–4, 12ff) and the fact of redemption (vv. 6–11) is too sharp and "uncharacteristic of Paul". Käsemann's rejection of the ethical in favour of the soteriological and eschatological "make[s] both human action and the character of Jesus virtually redundant" (Webster, 1986b:108). Moreover, by discarding a role for imitation in obedience, Käsemann's account tends to obviate the eschatological reserve and the need for any imperative. According to Webster (1986b:109) Käsemann also overestimates the continuity in the analogy between our union with Adam and our union with Christ. The latter requires "a deliberate act on our part" (Hooker quoted in Webster, 1986b:109).

These largely theological considerations lead Webster (1986b:109–110), contra Käsemann, to two proposals from his own reading of Philippians 2. First, the Christian life of obedience involves the agency of the believer. Second, Philippians 2 speaks not only to the fact of the Christian life, but also its shape. For Webster (e.g., 1986a:320; 1986b:105), this is the special contribution of imitation.

Compared to his relatively thorough theological treatment, Webster offers very little by way of grammatical evidence for his position. His main contribution in that direction is to point out the unusual appearances of Ἰησοῦς in verses 5 and 10. These, he argues, are a call to observe the earthly life of Jesus, and as such an invitation to imitation (Webster, 1986b:110). While this may be valid, it is hardly sufficient to deal with the serious grammatical difficulties raised by his interpretation of verse 5. To those we now turn.

O'Brien (1991:256–257; cf. Hansen, 2009:119; Silva, 2005:95–97) catalogues six arguments against the ethical interpretation and in favour of the kerygmatic interpretation:

1. Clause 5a and 5b are in parallel (i.e., ἐν ὑμῖν in 5a corresponds to ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in 5b). Adding the verb “was” to verse 5b, as required by the ethical interpretation, disrupts the symmetry between the two clauses and is somewhat forced. On the contrary, adding the verb “think” to 5b simply emphasises the underlying symmetry.
2. In the Pauline corpus, the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ is a technical term for union with Christ. For it to refer to an attitude that existed within Christ would require an unusual exception. While O'Brien does not mention it, the evidence of Philippians 4:2 strengthens this argument considerably. The syntax is almost identical to Philippians 2:5, and it also calls for a particular attitude. However, in the case of Philippians 4:2, the basis of that call is unambiguously union with Christ (Silva, 2005:96). Thus, for the ethical interpretation to stand, Paul must use the same verbal construction, in two notably different ways, within the same letter.
3. Verses 9–11 in the Christ hymn are simply not replicable for human agents, and are therefore redundant in the ethical interpretation.
4. It is highly unusual for Paul to point to the earthly life of Jesus as an ethical example.
5. If verse 5 refers to an attitude appropriate to those who exist within the dominion of Christ, then it is neatly balanced with verse 11, which declares his lordship. The latter, rather than ethical example, is in view.
6. If the exhortation of verse 5 is to be who you are (the kerygmatic interpretation), then again it stands in poetic balance with a similar exhortation in verse 12.

For some, the weight of these and other arguments is too much for the traditional translation of Philippians 2:5 to bear. Both Hansen (2009:121) and Silva (2005:97) reject the traditional translation and opt for something like “Be disposed toward one another as is proper for those who are united in Christ” (Silva’s translation). However, both also insist that departing from the traditional translation does not undermine the traditional, ethical interpretation of this verse. In fact, along with Webster (1986b:107), both argue that positing an either/or decision between the ethical interpretation and the kerygmatic interpretation is a false dichotomy. Silva (2005:97) is in agreement with Webster that such a dichotomy is the function of a prior dogmatic commitment to reject any connection between the salvation event and Christian morality. But this is to beg the question. On the contrary, both Hansen and Silva (again, along with Webster) assume some sort of dynamic relationship between union with Christ and following his example. That said, the primary point of interest here is that the traditional, ethical interpretation of Philippians 2:5 does not depend on the traditional translation of that verse.

Even so, the case for the traditional translation of verse 5 is not without its own merits. Again O'Brien (1991:257–262) offers a useful summary:

1. Supplying the verb “think” in clause 5b results in a tautology. It also results in the awkward suggestion that the attitude of believers could somehow be different to those who are in Christ, as if these were somehow two different spheres of existence. In fact, believers are those in Christ.
2. The phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ is not the usual technical phrase (ἐν Χριστῷ) that Paul uses to denote union with Christ. This adds weight to the argument that the character of earthly Jesus himself is the object of Christian conformity.
3. Käsemann overstates the rarity of the Pauline appeal to Jesus as ethical example. Passages such as Romans 15:1–7, 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1; 2 Corinthians 8:9 and 1 Thessalonians 1:6 are evidence that Paul made such appeals fairly regularly.
4. In the immediate context there are multiple semantic connections tying the conduct of the Philippians to the Christ hymn and suggesting that the latter was presented as a pattern to be followed.
5. Speculating about the meaning of the Christ hymn in isolation from its context is special pleading.
6. Verses 9–11 are not redundant in the ethical interpretation. Rather, in demonstrating the divine vindication of Christ's humiliation and obedience, they add untold authority to his credibility as an example to be followed.

For all these reasons, O'Brien (1991:262) concludes that “Paul's object in using [the Christ hymn] here is not primarily to give instruction in doctrine but to appeal to the conduct of Christ and to re-enforce instruction in Christian living.” As such, verse 5 functions as a bridge between the instruction of verses 1–4 and the example of Christ in verses 6–11.

Whether one takes the “hard” traditional view, which defends the traditional translation of verse 5 (as per O'Brien), or the more accommodating synthetic view, which discards the traditional translation of verse 5 (as per Hansen and Silva) – on both of these views the traditional, ethical interpretation stands. Moreover, there is considerably more evidence for taking such a view than is presented by Webster. This evidence is bolstered by what we read in the rest of Philippians.

- *Evidence from the immediate context*

First, we consider the immediate context on Philippians 2:12–18. These verses conclude Paul's paraenesis that began in 1:27. O'Brien (1991:272–273) points out a number of thematic links (e.g., witness and eschatology) and semantic links (e.g., ὑπήκοος in v. 8 and ὑπηκούσατε in v. 12)

with the wider section. Given these interconnections, the inferential conjunction in verse 12 shows that what follows derives from what precedes. What precedes is the Christ hymn. What follows is a brief and yet profoundly rich exposition of the relationship between the agency of God and the agency of man in the Christian life (Phil. 2:12–13):

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,<sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

In verse 12, Paul is exhorting the Philippians to obey, using the same language he used of Christ's obedience in the Christ hymn (v. 8). Even Martin (1987:110), who, with Käsemann, is a leading advocate for the kerygmatic interpretation of Philippians 2:5, concludes of 2:12, "As he obeyed, so should you!" The imitation of Christ is in view. Here Paul applies it where we might least expect him to: to obedience in the working out of salvation.<sup>78</sup> We might think salvation is entirely off limits to human agency, but here Paul suggests otherwise. Moreover, the preposition in the compound imperative "κατεργάζεσθε" has the perfective, intensifying force of carrying the work to completion (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:452; cf. Robertson, 1919:562–563). Thus, nothing less than a real human agency is called for in the imitation of Christ.

That said, in verse 13 Paul immediately qualifies this human agency. It is not merely passive – that would be to contradict what he has just said in verse 12. On the other hand, it is by no means independent; nor is it some cooperative synergy – verse 13 rules out any such view. In fact, Paul begins his qualification of human agency at the end of verse 12. "Fear and trembling" is the appropriate disposition for the exercise of human agency, since it acknowledges the creative and ruling presence of divine being and agency (Hansen, 2009:175–176). Verse 13 then begins with the postpositive γάρ, showing a causal relation between God's agency and human agency (Silva, 2005:122). Paul also uses the periphrastic construction which follows ("For God is the one who works", rather than "For God works") to emphasise divine agency (O'Brien, 1991:286; Silva, 2005:122). Moreover, the sovereignty of God's agency extends to the interior motives of human agency ("to will and to work"; Silva, 2005:122). Finally, Paul uses the language of providence to define the purpose of divine agency as bringing about the divine will. Εὐδοκία is a word associated with God's providential plan for salvation history (e.g., Eph. 1:5, 9). Here at the end of verse 13 it parallels neatly with the eschatological reference at the end of verse 12 (O'Brien, 1991:289). The

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<sup>78</sup> For arguments in favour of retaining the theological meaning of salvation (personal spiritual rescue), rather than discarding it for the sociological meaning (the health of the community), see O'Brien (1991:277–280).

cumulative effect of all these features of verse 13 on our understanding of verse 12, and how the two relate, is described succinctly by Hansen (2009:178):

Verses 12 and 13 are linked together as effect and cause: our work is effect; God's work is the cause of our work... God's total sovereignty is the air we breathe and the ground we walk on to fulfill our human responsibility to work.

For Paul, human agency in imitation is a real agency, but one entirely established and sustained by an overruling and undergirding divine agency for the purposes of God.

To conclude the section, in Philippians 2:18 Paul offers himself as an example to be followed as he rejoices in the face of suffering and death (O'Brien, 1991:272–273). He makes a similar call in chapter 3 verse 17, though it is explicit and much more forceful. Philippians 3:17 has an unusually high concentration of words connoting imitation: the *γίνεσθε μιμηταί* imperative combination (“become imitators”; see 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 above), the *σκοπεῖτε* imperative (“keep your eyes upon”)<sup>79</sup>, the participle form of *περιπατέω* (“to walk” as a metaphor for way of life; see 4.2.2, 4.2.3 and 4.2.5 above), *καθώς* (“just as” – a marker emphasising conformity; Danker, 2009:q.v.; see 4.2.5 above), and *τύπον* (“a model of behavior as an example to be imitated”; Louw & Nida, 1989:58.59; cf. Friberg et al., 2000:s.v. *τύπος*). The context in chapter 3 is Paul's surrender of privilege and status for the sake of Christ, with strong echoes of Christ's own surrender described in Philippians 2:5–8. It appears that in Philippians 3:17 Paul is marshalling a cluster of imitation language in order to bolster his exhortation. He is calling on the Philippians to imitate him and thereby to join with him in imitating Christ (Hansen, 2009:261–262).

- *Evidence from the rest of the letter*

Philippians is a book full of exemplars. Paul has already offered Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:19–30) as examples of those who imitate Christ. After offering himself as an example in chapter 3, he concludes in chapter 4 verse 1: “Therefore, my brothers... stand firm thus in the Lord.” The prepositional phrase “in the Lord” denotes union with Christ. The adverb “thus” refers back to 3:17 (Hansen, 2009:281–282). In that case, the way to stand firm in the Lord is to follow the example of Paul and his associates as they follow the example of Christ. The way to participate in Christ is to imitate Christ.

Philippians is a book full of exemplars. This adds weight to the claims of Webster and others who read Philippians 2:5 as a call to imitate Christ. In a sustained exhortation to live life according to

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<sup>79</sup> This word speaks “... of self-examination based on inspection of a model or example before one” (Friberg et al., 2000:s.v. *σκοπέω*).

a Christ-like pattern of humble, suffering service, Paul presents a number of those who have modelled this pattern. It would be strange if he omitted Christ himself. On the contrary, the grammatical and theological arguments outlined above suggest that Christ is presented as the first, the supreme, the original and seminal example. Of course, he is infinitely more than that. But he is not less. Participation in his agency enervates our agency in imitation.

#### **4.2.6.3 Summary and conclusion**

Webster chose Philippians 2:5 as an important front on which to battle for the biblical legitimacy of *imitatio Christi*. Even after a cursory reading, it is easy to see why. The modern history of interpretation is split between ethical readings stressing imitation, and kerygmatic readings stressing participation. Webster contends for the former without excluding the latter. Of Philippians 2:5–11 he concludes (Webster, 1986b:111):

Precisely because [it] is the saving recital of the saving history of Jesus Christ, it is equally an exhortation to the Christian life as a life moulded by the same history...

... Christ's action is more than vicarious: it is also evocative, or, perhaps better, provocative, in that it constitutes a summons to a properly dependent mimesis.

For Webster (1986b:114) imitation is rooted in participation. This prevents an “absolute hiatus” between Christ and the Christian. It also prevents a collapse into “identity of being” (Webster, 1986b:114).

The analysis above is in broad agreement with Webster's conclusions. A particular area of agreement was a notable reticence on the part of Protestant theologians to use the biblical language of imitation. Even a strong advocate of imitation, like O'Brien (1991:205; cf. Hansen, 2009:121), shrinks from using the actual word 'imitation' because of “later connotations of the term”. We see a similar policy in Torrance, though it seems to be accompanied by an aversion to the underlying concept as well. Suffice it to say that Webster's conclusions are, in the main, borne out by the analysis here.

Nevertheless, there are some differences. Webster (1986b:96) undertakes to add “a little exegetical flesh” to his theological convictions on imitation, but he only partially honours that commitment. He refers mainly to secondary literature, offers little by way of close exegesis of the text, and does not fully articulate the grammatical complexity of interpreting Philippians 2:5. His account of the relation of imitation and participation is compelling, but its connection to Paul's letter to the Philippians is often hidden from view.

If it is correct, the analysis above adds evidentiary weight to Webster’s conclusions. It also explicitly grounds his compelling account of the relation between participation and imitation in the text, and deepens that account by doing so. Philippians teaches us that imitation is rooted in participation, and that participation is expressed in imitation.

#### 4.2.7 1 and 2 Thessalonians

##### 4.2.7.1 The text

###### Nestle–Aland (2012)

<sup>6</sup> Καὶ ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου,  
<sup>7</sup> ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ.

<sup>14</sup> Ὑμεῖς γὰρ μιμηταὶ ἐγενήθητε, ἀδελφοί, τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὐσῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπάθετε καὶ ὑμεῖς ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν καθὼς καὶ αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων,

<sup>7</sup> Αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἶδατε πῶς δεῖ μιμεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς, ὅτι οὐκ ἠτακτήσαμεν ἐν ὑμῖν...

...<sup>9</sup> οὐχ ὅτι οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ’ ἵνα ἑαυτοὺς τύπον δῶμεν ὑμῖν εἰς τὸ μιμεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς.

###### English Standard Version (2016)

<sup>6</sup> And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

<sup>7</sup> so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (1 Thess. 1:6–7)

<sup>14</sup> For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, (1 Thess. 2:14)

<sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you...

...<sup>9</sup> It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. (2 Thess. 3:7, 9)

##### 4.2.7.2 Analysis

- *Introduction and context*

Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians from Corinth within twenty years of the death of Jesus, in approximately AD 50. As such, it is one of the earliest of the New Testament letters (Morris, 1984:22). He wrote to “a young, very enthusiastic, but as yet imperfectly instructed” church in order to spur them on to maturity in the face of various internal and external pressures (Morris, 1984:26). However, the issues persisted, and soon afterward Paul was prompted to write a second letter, with the same purpose in mind (Morris, 1984:38). Of interest here is the frequent use Paul makes of imitation, of imitation in relation to participation, and of the relation between divine and human agency, in order to achieve his purpose.

- *Exegesis (1 Thessalonians)*

We see the dynamics of agency play out from the very first verse of the first letter. Paul greets the Thessalonian church as those “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”. Their very existence is a participation in the filial unity of divine being and agency (Fee, 2009:15–16; Morris, 1984:42). In verses 2 and 3, Paul proceeds immediately to thanksgiving for the signs of divine being and agency manifesting among the Thessalonians. Divine being and agency has awakened in this church a human agency in the triad of faith, hope and love. The Thessalonians are “the subject of these verbal ideas” (Fee, 2009:23), which issue in “a total disposition of one’s life that involves deliberate choices and determined effort” (Furnish, 2007:42). Lest his readers misunderstand the nature of human agency, Paul adds the all-important prepositional phrase “in our Lord Jesus Christ”. Morris (1984:45) interprets that phrase as referring to “the whole of the Christian life”. Thus, a reference to the agency of the church is hedged in before (“before our God and Father”) and behind (“in our Lord Jesus Christ”) by divine being and agency.

In verse 4, Paul addresses the Thessalonians as “brothers loved by God” before expressing his ultimate reason for thanksgiving – their election (Furnish, 2007:42–43). In the Pauline corpus the vocative “brothers” signals participation in the household of God in and through Christ (Fee, 2009:30). The evidence of their election into the family, verse 5, is that human agency in preaching the gospel was empowered by the divine agency of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 5b, Paul reminds his readers of his way of life in their midst, before describing in verse 6 how they became imitators of that way (“of us and of the Lord”) in their willingness to suffer joyfully for the Word. Indeed, so impressive was their imitation of Christ, Paul and Paul’s associates, that the Thessalonians themselves became a model for all believers in ancient Greece (Fee, 2009:40).

Thus, Paul introduces imitation very early on in the letter. Perhaps this is to be expected. Weima (2014:97–98) argues (contra Webster and others) that, while the language of imitation is relatively rare in Paul, the concept of imitation appears frequently. In fact, it can be found in every letter traditionally ascribed to Paul, with the one exception of Romans (Getty, cited in Weima, 2014:98n30).<sup>80</sup> Weima (2014:98) suggests that we can understand Paul’s reliance on the imitation theme in terms of discipleship practices in the ancient world. In the culture Paul inhabited, if teachers were to be considered credible, they were expected to dispense instruction not only in terms of word (*logos*) but also by way of example (*ethos*). Of course, the example he offered was of one who followed the example of Christ. His call to imitate was ultimately a call to imitate Christ (v. 6; cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). The latter was a special burden for Paul, since the New Testament was not

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<sup>80</sup> I would even question the exclusion of Romans. Take Romans 15:1–7, for example.

yet compiled and his churches had no written word to guide them in Christian living (Fee, 2009:36). Hence imitation is very important to Paul. Fee (2009:38) describes imitation as “the key to the ethical instructions given in his churches”.

What we see in verses 5b–7 is an iteration between *logos* and *ethos*. These verses also describe a hierarchy of imitation-in-participation flowing from Paul and his companions through the Thessalonians and out into the churches of the region (Fee, 2009:41).

We must not lose sight of the fact that in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 imitation is in the indicative. It has already happened. The Thessalonians have willingly and joyfully endured suffering, as did Christ and Paul before them. Indeed, their imitation is the fruit of their election and the Spirit-empowered proclamation of the Word (vv. 4–5). Paul is presenting it here as evidence of their participation in Christ, for which he gives thanks. The word translated “example” (τύπων) in verse 7 strengthens this conclusion. The word, which we encountered in Philippians 3:17 above, describes a mould that would be used to make an imprint on a malleable material like clay. Thus it refers not merely to an example to be followed, but to a life re-formed, which itself becomes formative (Weima, 2014:102). The visible manifestation of a transforming union with Christ is itself a power for transformation in others. The lives of the Thessalonians were “stamped by the Lord”, and in turn stamped the lives of other believers (Furnish, 2007:46). Imitation is evidence of participation.

We see the same theme repeated in 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16. This section constitutes Paul’s return to thanksgiving, after an intervening description and defence of his ministry (Furnish, 2007:64). References to thanksgiving, imitation and affliction tie this section to the opening of chapter 1 (Furnish, 2007:64). Once again, we see the interplay of human agency and divine agency in the preaching of the Word (2:13). Once again, the familial vocative functions as a signal of participation (Fee, 2009:30, 92). Once again, we encounter the iteration between *logos* and *ethos* in Paul’s commendation of the Thessalonian ethic. Once again, the nature of the imitation is a willingness to suffer, endurance, or courage (Fee, 2009:92–93; Furnish, 2007:64–66; Weima, 2014:164). The innovation in this section is introduced by mention of the Judean churches (v. 14). Paul mentions them to show that the Thessalonians, by their imitation, participate “in a long and distinguished line of those in Palestine who were persecuted for their faith: the OT prophets, the Lord Jesus, the earliest Christians, and even the apostle himself” (Weima, 2014:167). Indeed, as was the case in chapter 1, so here: imitation is evidence that the Thessalonians accepted the Word and joined those churches who participate in Christ. Imitation is evidence of participation. Given the additional reference to the Judean churches, we can add: imitation deepens participation.

- *Exegesis (2 Thessalonians)*

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul repeatedly addressed the question of a work ethic appropriate to those in Christ (2:9; 4:10–12; 5:14; Furnish, 2007:174). It is clear that there were those in the community who were violating this ethic (5:14). However, we know from his second letter that the problem persisted, and this no doubt formed part of his motive in writing again. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12 he writes to this very issue and once again deploys imitation at the heart of his strategy.

The section is framed by two references to the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 6, 12; Furnish, 2007:175). Both are an appeal to authority, but both are combined with the vocative “brothers” (vv. 6, 13) to suggest Christ not only as King, but also as the head of the family (Morris, 1984:141; Weima, 2014:620). Participation frames the apostle’s call to imitation.

The offending parties are also addressed as brothers (v. 6). Their offence is “walking in idleness”. Walking, as we have noted repeatedly, refers to a pattern of life. The adverb translated “idle” is *ἀτάκτως*. It denotes disorder or unruliness (Furnish, 2007:174). Given the context, it refers to those disturbing the order in the community through their idleness. Hence Fee’s (2009:328) compound designation, the disruptive-idle.

Paul’s correction comes in the form of both *logos* (vv. 6, 10) and a call to imitate (vv. 7a, 9) the corresponding *ethos* (vv. 7b, 8). As we noted above, this was the prevailing cultural, and particularly Jewish, paradigm of discipleship (Fee, 2009:329). First, Paul reminds his readers of the *logos*. In verse 6, he charges the disorderly with adopting a pattern of life that violated the tradition he had given to them. In verse 10, he summarises that tradition in the axiom: if you won’t work, you won’t eat. In verses 7b and 8, he describes how he and his associates lived out the corresponding *ethos*: they were not disorderly; they worked for their food. They did so (vv. 7a, 9) in order to establish an orderly pattern (*τύπον*) to imitate.

In verses 11 and 12, Paul addresses the disorderly directly. He commands and encourages them “in the Lord Jesus Christ”. The combination of verbs implies both authority and brotherly compassion, and the same double implication is therefore probably also intended by the prepositional phrase “in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Weima, 2014:620). The call to imitate is issued in the authority and compassion of the Lord Jesus. Participation gives imitation an indicative security as well as an imperative force.

### 4.2.7.3 Summary and conclusion

First and Second Thessalonians add much to our understanding of participation, imitation and agency. We discover that imitation was introduced to the church early on.<sup>81</sup> Imitation was part of the ancient culture of discipleship, and so it was natural for Paul to adapt it to his purposes. Participation in Christ was the differentiating feature of the imitation he called for. Scholars working on the Thessalonian Epistles note the frequency of imitation in the Pauline corpus. They also note the centrality of imitation to the Pauline ethic. The analysis here showed that imitation is evidence of participation and a means of deepening participation. On the other hand, participation frames imitation and provides a context for a truly biblical imitation.

### 4.2.8 The Pastoral Epistles

#### 4.2.8.1 The text

##### Nestle–Aland (2012)

<sup>16</sup> ἀλλὰ διὰ τοῦτο ἠλεήθην, ἵνα ἐν ἐμοὶ πρῶτῳ ἐνδείξῃται Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς τὴν ἅπασαν μακροθυμίαν πρὸς ὑποτύπωσιν τῶν μελλόντων πιστεύειν ἐπ' αὐτῷ εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

<sup>12</sup> Μηδεὶς σου τῆς νεότητος καταφρονεῖτω, ἀλλὰ τύπος γίνου τῶν πιστῶν ἐν λόγῳ, ἐν ἀναστροφῇ, ἐν ἀγάπῃ, ἐν πίστει, ἐν ἀγνείᾳ.

<sup>13</sup> Ὑποτύπωσιν ἔχε ὑγιαίνοντων λόγων ὧν παρ' ἐμοῦ ἤκουσας ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

<sup>14</sup> τὴν καλὴν παραθήκην φύλαξον διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου τοῦ ἐνοικοῦντος ἐν ἡμῖν.

<sup>10</sup> Σὺ δὲ παρηκολούθησάς μου τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ, τῇ ἀγωγῇ, τῇ προθέσει, τῇ πίστει, τῇ μακροθυμίᾳ, τῇ ἀγάπῃ, τῇ ὑπομονῇ,

<sup>11</sup> τοῖς διωγμοῖς, τοῖς παθήμασιν, ...

<sup>7</sup> περὶ πάντα, σεαυτὸν παρεχόμενος τύπον καλῶν ἔργων, ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ ἀφθορίαν, σεμνότητα,

<sup>8</sup> λόγον ὑγιῆ ἀκατάγνωστον, ἵνα ὁ ἐξ ἐναντίας ἐντραπῇ μηδὲν ἔχων λέγειν περὶ ἡμῶν φαῦλον.

##### English Standard Version (2016)

<sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. (1 Tim. 1:16)

<sup>12</sup> Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (1 Tim. 4:12)

<sup>13</sup> Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

<sup>14</sup> By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. (2 Tim. 1:13–14)

<sup>10</sup> You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,

<sup>11</sup> my persecutions and sufferings... (2 Tim. 3:10–11a)

<sup>7</sup> Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity,

<sup>8</sup> and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. (Titus 2:7–8)

<sup>81</sup> Galatians is also evidence of that fact.

#### 4.2.8.2 Analysis

- *Introduction and context*

Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles during a fourth missionary journey (1 Timothy, Titus) and final Roman imprisonment (2 Timothy), shortly before his death (circa AD 64–65; Carson & Moo, 2005:572, 578, 583). He wrote letters that were personally addressed to Timothy and Titus as leaders of the churches at Ephesus and Crete, respectively, perhaps with some public reading and application intended (Carson & Moo, 2005:572–573). This reconstruction explains much of the commonality between these letters: they were written by Paul, to church leaders, during the middle of the first century AD, to combat the false teaching typical of that period (Carson & Moo, 2005:563–564). That is not to say the false teachings addressed in each letter are identical. Paul does not give a definitive description of the false teaching. We can say that he considered it dangerous because of its obsession with frivolous secondary issues; that it led to the opposite excesses of licentiousness and asceticism; and that at least part of it was Jewish in character (Guthrie, 1990:44–45). It may be that some of these features were rooted in an over-realised eschatology (Mounce, 2000:cxxxii). Whatever the case, the result was three letters deeply concerned with the practical outworking of faith and doctrine, specifically in the life and order of the church (Guthrie, 1990:19). This interplay between “theological core” (Mounce, 2000:lxix) and Christian praxis, and the role of modelling in Paul’s purposes, make the Pastorals of particular interest to this study.

- *Exegesis (1 Timothy)*

In 1 Timothy 1:16, Paul gives his testimony as a contrast to the false teachers (Köstenberger, 2017:80). He puts himself forward as an example (*ὑποτύπωσιν*) of Christ’s perfect patience. The example is for those who believe for eternal life. The question is: what exactly is Paul modelling to believers? What is included within the compass of Christ’s “patience... for eternal life”? Paul suggests an answer in the previous verses.

In verse 13 he describes his former way of life in a triad of unbelief: blasphemy, persecution and pride. In verse 14 he describes his transformed life of participation “in the Lord” in a corresponding triad: grace, faith and love. There is no doubt that faith and love are the products of divine agency. Indeed, Fee (quoted in Mounce, 2000:54) comments that “For Paul, God’s is always the prior action. Faith is a response to grace... and faith acts in love...” The question in verse 14 is: Whose faith and love are in view? Is it those of Christ, or those of Paul? Given the correspondence of the two triads, it seems probable that faith and love describe a transformation in Paul’s own way of life. Faith and love are paired regularly throughout the Pastorals (Köstenberger, 2017:152). All the other pairings in 1 Timothy (2:15, 4:12 and 6:11) refer to the agency of believers, which gives

further credibility to reading verse 14 in the same way. Indeed, Towner (2006:142) refers to this pairing as “a summary of Christian existence”. There is also a broad parallelism between verses 12–14 and 15–16 (Köstenberger, 2017:84), with verse 14 (faith and love) corresponding to verse 16 (Paul as model). In all, it would appear that Paul’s faith and love are included in the example he is to the believers.

The verb in verse 16 accords with this conclusion. Ἐνδείξεται is a compound verb in which the preposition suggests “a more complete demonstration than the simple vb.” (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:489). Paul is a model to believers of God’s grace to undeserving sinners, which includes the life of grace lived out in faith and love.

Of course, modelling is the other side of imitation. Modelling assumes that Christian agency can be exercised in an imitative response, and itself exercises agency on that assumption. The nature and relevance of modelling will become clearer as we proceed.

In 1 Timothy 4:12 Paul instructs Timothy to “set the believers an example...” The combination τύπος γίνου corresponds to γίνεσθε μιμηταί as modelling to imitation. The two imperatives are from the same root, γίνομαι, and imply “habitual action” or “a way of life” (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:356, 443, 494). Cranfield (quoted in Mounce, 2000:259; cf. Towner, 2006:315) describes the meaning of τύπος as “a mark made by striking... an impression made by something, such an impression used in its turn as a mould to shape something else.” Thus, it does not describe mere parroting, but the impression of one life on another. Modelling and imitation are thus relational in essence. Indeed, Rogers and Rogers (1998:494) include in their definition of τύπος “taking the role of a father”. This language helps to capture the nature of biblical imitation, controlled as it is by participation in Christ.

The scope of the modelling (and hence the imitation) in verse 12 is extensive: “in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity”. Timothy is to live his whole life as a model. And this is something in which he must exercise the strongest agency. It is something in which he must exercise the discipline of an athlete (vv. 7–8). It is something he must pursue (see 1 Tim. 6:11, which includes a similar scope with some of the same language). Strong descriptors for a robust human agency are typical of Paul throughout the Pastorals (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:4, 15; 4:7–8; Titus 2:14; Köstenberger, 2017:507–508). A biblical account of imitation rests on a biblical account of a robust Christian agency.

In 1 Timothy 4:13 Paul calls for devotion in the public reading of Scripture. The proximity of imitation and Scripture is a theme to which we will return in a moment. In verse 15 we return to Paul’s strong exhortation for agency. Μελέτα, the imperative translated “practice” in the ESV,

has connotations of “taking care” or “taking pains” in thought and in deed (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:495). “Diligence would fit in well with the athletic metaphor which seems to have been in the writer’s mind” (Guthrie, 1990:112). That is the sense given by the exegetical “immerse yourself in them” (ESV). The purpose is that all may see his progress. Given the call for modelling in verse 12, it appears the church would be the primary beneficiaries of this display of progress, for the sake of imitation. Indeed, if Timothy can “persist in this” (ongoing agency) he will “save both [him]self and [his] hearers” (v. 16). Timothy’s ongoing agency in reading Scripture, in attending to his gift, and in providing a model to be imitated, will help his hearers work out their salvation (cf. Phil. 2:12; Guthrie, 1990:113). Once again, we find human agency in imitation functioning in the realm of salvation (see 4.2.6.2 above). Once again, divine agency is the prior and abiding condition (1 Tim. 4:10; cf. Titus 1:3–4).

- *Exegesis (2 Timothy)*

In the first chapter of 2 Timothy, Paul gives thanks and encourages Timothy from their respective experiences, past and present (Guthrie, 1990:135). In verse 13 he issues a charge in the same language as 1 Timothy 1:16. “ὑποτύπωσιν” is a compound noun denoting “an outline sketch or ground plan used by an artist” (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:501). Timothy is to retain the pattern of sound words he heard from Paul *in* faith and love. The preposition “specifies the principles in which the example is to be held” (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:501). Again, the faith and love pairing, which we already encountered in 1 Timothy 1:14 and 1 Timothy 4:12, conveys the agency of the Christian. In other words, Timothy is to imitate Paul in word and deed. And yet, such imitation exists only, verse 13, “in Christ Jesus” (cf. Towner, 1994:167; Towner, 2006:478).

Verses 13 and 14 are a chiasmic parallelism, where the imperative “guard” (v. 14) is in parallel with “keep” (v. 13); “the good deposit” (v. 14) corresponds to Paul’s “pattern” of word and deed (v. 13); and “by the Holy Spirit” (v. 14) corresponds to “in Christ Jesus” (v. 13; Towner, 1994:166). The point is made twice over: human agency in imitation exists by and within divine agency by participation (cf. Towner, 2006:479). It is surely not by accident that the apostle follows this section with three lived examples (2 Tim. 1:15–18; cf. Mounce, 2000:491; Towner, 1994:167).

As Paul begins to draw his second letter to Timothy to a close (2 Tim. 3:10), he reminds him of past faithfulness as a spur to ongoing faithfulness (Köstenberger, 2017:262). “You have followed” (παρηκολούθησάς) – the word is a technical term used to describe the master–disciple relationship, and can therefore be translated “You have taken my example” (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:505). In fact, it is used in this way in 1 Timothy 4:6 (Mounce, 2000:556). Towner (2006:570) asserts that Paul is “laying the groundwork for renewed imitation”.

Once again, the scope of imitation is striking: in teaching, conduct and purpose; and then in a range of virtues, namely, faith, patience, love, steadfastness; and finally, in a willingness to endure suffering and persecution.<sup>82</sup> This truly is total imitation. Every aspect of “a godly life in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:12) is modelled and to be received as formative.

In contrast to “evil people and imposters” (v. 13), Timothy is to remain in the gospel, knowing those from whom he learned it (Mounce, 2000:561). The implicit idea is that they modelled lives consistent with that message. Indeed, the verb in verse 14 translated by Rogers and Rogers (1998:505) as “remain” denotes “a constant and continual habit of life”, so praxis is integrated with doctrine and both are in view.<sup>83</sup>

The sufficiency of Scripture to “make you wise for salvation” and “equip the man of God for every good work” draws an interesting analogy with imitation. The two function in the same way: they both form the believer for the righteous exercise of agency in Christ by his Spirit. In their physical absence, we must turn to Scripture in order to imitate Christ and his apostles. We must turn to Scripture in order to discern where our leaders are modelling Christ and his apostles, so that we might imitate them. Scripture read and proclaimed in the power of the Spirit norms our imitation (cf. Yarbrough, 2008:89).

- *Exegesis (Titus)*

On Titus 2:7, Mounce (2000:413) comments, “This need for modelling is found throughout Paul... and contrasts with the behaviour of the opponents.” We find that *τύπον* recurs here, carrying its usual force. It is combined with the reflexive pronoun *σεαυτόν* and the present participle *παρεχόμενος*<sup>84</sup> to underscore Titus’ responsibility in providing an example. In the prepositional phrase *περὶ πάντα*, we once again encounter the comprehensive span of modelling – “in all things”. Mounce (2000:413) synthesises these various elements to capture the essence of verses 7–8:

Titus is to be a mold into which others can be impressed and therefore bear a likeness to him... Titus, who provides an example in his good works, contrasts with the opponents, who are unfit for any good work (Titus 1:16).

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<sup>82</sup> Here again faith and love are used in the ethical sense of Christian agency.

<sup>83</sup> *Μένω* is an important word in John’s letters (see 4.2.11 below), where it carries a slightly different technical meaning.

<sup>84</sup> The participle is from the verb *παρέχω*, “to cause someth. to be present for the other” (Danker, 2009:q.v.; emphasis added).

The mention of “God our Saviour” in verse 10 and the coordinating conjunction at the beginning of verse 11 introduce verses 11–14 as the “theological basis” for the ethical action described in Titus 2:1–10 (Guthrie, 1990:219; cf. Towner, 2006:731). It is the gracious agency of God in Christ that “purif[ies] for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (v. 14). The grace of God brings salvation, trains for godliness and offers hope. It is the divine agency that vivifies human agency for an overflow of godliness through modelling and imitation. Moreover, God is presented as the ultimate model for our imitation (Titus 3:1–7; Köstenberger, 2017:491).

Thus Titus 2:7–8 confirm much of what we have already found in the Pastorals: human agency in modelling, across every area of life, for the sake of witness. All this is in view of God’s prior, motivating and all-encompassing agency (Titus 2:11–14).

#### **4.2.8.3 Summary and conclusion**

The Pastoral Epistles give us another perspective on imitation. They give us insight into ‘the other side’ of imitation, that is, into modelling. Time and again, Christian leaders are presented as a moulding mould that has already itself been moulded. In other words, modelling (and therefore imitation) can take place only within the domain of participation in Christ; and participation in Christ demands modelling (and therefore imitation). The other distinctive features of the imitation presented in the Pastoral Epistles are its nature and scope. In the Pastorals, imitation is an ongoing personal, relational interaction whereby one whole life is impressed into another by the determined efforts of both the modeller and the imitator. Like participation, imitation is an all-encompassing reality. Divine agency and human agency are both necessary in Paul’s account of imitation.

#### **4.2.9 The possibility of development in the Pauline corpus**

All the passages in this chapter have been ordered canonically, rather than chronologically by estimated date of writing. Passages from the Pauline corpus are no exception. However, ordering the Pauline passages chronologically offers some insight into the possibility of development in Paul’s thought, should such development exist. Indeed, revisiting the passages chronologically, based on the dating proposed by Carson and Moo (2005), does seem to yield some evidence of development.

The letter to the Galatians (circa AD 48) shows that Paul was eager to communicate the concept of imitation in the earliest of his extant writings. While he did not use the explicit language of imitation, the concept is undeniably present (e.g., Gal. 4:12). Just a few years later, in his letters to the Thessalonian church (circa AD 50–51), he transitioned to using the explicit language of

imitation (e.g., 1 Thess. 2:14) and also closely associated word groups (e.g., *τύπος*; 1 Thess. 1:7; 2:14). Moreover, the theme of imitation is introduced very early on in 1 Thessalonians, which speaks to its importance, and it is presented in some sophistication. Indeed, Paul's writing on imitation at this early stage reflects the discipleship practices of the time, with their integration of logos and ethos. The Thessalonian correspondence shows that this integration is rooted in a participation that frames and anchors imitation, and an imitation that evidences, promotes and deepens participation. By the time Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians (circa AD 55) and his letter to the Philippians (circa AD 55–60), he was using the explicit language of imitation in the imperatival form (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17). Ephesians (circa AD 60) is arguably the high point of this development towards an explicit imperative. Here we also find that participation and imitation are deeply integrated. The Pastoral Epistles (circa AD 63–65) are the last letters to be considered in this chronological ordering. The explicit language of imitation is missing from these letters, but that is hardly surprising, given that they are addressed to leaders who are exhorted to model Christ-likeness to their people. Thus, the concept of imitation is very much present; only, it is explored from the other side – the side of modelling. From the perspective and in the language of modelling, we discover in the Pastoral Epistles a total imitation (all of life) embedded in a total participation (with no room for independent agency).

Thus, if there is development in the Pauline corpus, it appears to have little to do with his conception of participation, imitation and agency, which exhibits a high level of sophistication from the outset. It has more to do with his boldness in articulation. With the passage of time, the apostle seems to grow bolder and bolder in calling his churches to imitate Christ as they participate in him. This may simply be a function of Paul's growth in appropriation of the language most suited to the message he wished to convey.

## 4.2.10 1 and 2 Peter

### 4.2.10.1 The text

#### Nestle–Aland (2012)

<sup>14</sup> ὡς τέκνα ὑπακοῆς μὴ συσχηματιζόμενοι ταῖς πρότερον ἐν τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ ὑμῶν ἐπιθυμίαις,  
<sup>15</sup> ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν καλέσαντα ὑμᾶς ἅγιον καὶ αὐτοὶ ἅγιοι ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ γενήθητε,  
<sup>16</sup> διότι γέγραπται· ἅγιοι ἔσεσθε, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἅγιος.

<sup>21</sup> εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκλήθητε, ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἔπαθεν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ὑμῖν ὑπολιμπάνων ὑπογραμμόν, ἵνα ἐπακολουθήσητε τοῖς ἴχνεσιν αὐτοῦ,

<sup>1</sup> Χριστοῦ οὖν παθόντος σαρκὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς τὴν αὐτὴν ἔννοιαν ὀπλίσασθε, ὅτι ὁ παθὼν σαρκὶ πέπαυται ἀμαρτίας

#### English Standard Version (2016)

<sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,  
<sup>15</sup> but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,  
<sup>16</sup> since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Pet. 1:14–16)

<sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (1 Pet. 2:21)

<sup>1</sup> Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, (1 Pet. 4:1)

### 4.2.10.2 Analysis

- *Introduction and context*

First Peter was written by the apostle Peter from Rome (circa AD 62–63) to the predominantly Gentile churches of Asia Minor in order to encourage them in their suffering amidst a hostile pagan culture (Carson & Moo, 2005:638–648). Peter wrote a second epistle from Rome before his death in AD 65. He wrote to protect the same churches from false teaching (Carson & Moo, 2005:657–664). In studying these two letters, we arrive at many of the same conclusions regarding participation, imitation and agency, but from a uniquely Petrine perspective.

- *Exegesis (1 Peter)*

The first text of interest is 1 Peter 1:15–16. In 1 Peter 1:3–12, the apostle has been extolling the great salvation blessings in which his readers share. It is a paean of praise for the gracious agency of God in Christ. Verses 13–25 are the application of this truth (Grudem, 1988:47, 80), introduced by the inferential conjunction *διό*. Verse 13 is a direct call to prepare for action set within the eschatological frame of Christ’s return (Green, 2007:43). Thus, the call to human agency in the present is embedded in the past (vv. 3–12) and future (v. 13) realities of divine agency.

Indeed, it is divine being and agency from eternity that creates and upholds the potential for human being and agency in the present. It is only “as obedient children” (v. 14) that Peter’s readers can act in response to this call. It is only the merciful agency of God that gifted them this

identity and capacity for agency through spiritual rebirth (v. 3). As such, they are called upon to resist the conforming desires of their former state of being (v. 14). Theirs was a state of ignorance that knew nothing of the character and purposes of God (Green, 2007:37–38). In that state they would be “*molded* by whatever their sinful desires suggest” (Marshall, 1991:52; emphasis mine). Sinful desires took the place of Christ as the object of conformity. To this, verse 14 offers a negative prohibition; verses 15–16 offer a positive replacement.

The call to holiness (v. 15) is rooted in a direct quotation from Leviticus 19:2 (v. 16; Green, 2007:44). The analysis of that chapter has a direct bearing and reinforces the conclusions that follow here (see 4.2.1 above). In the place of ignorant desires, verse 15 asserts the being (“He... is holy”) and agency (“He who called you”) of God as the means and object of conformity (“you also be holy”).<sup>85</sup> Verse 16 provides the biblical warrant from Leviticus 19:2. Grudem (1988:83) says of the calling:

... it was God who initiated their salvation when the gospel came to them in power, summoning them out of darkness (2:9) into fellowship with himself. It was a powerful, effectual calling into the Christian life and all it involves—a calling to live with God and to be like him.

He then says of the command to be holy (Grudem, 1988:85):

This is just one example of the way the New Testament repeatedly assumes that imitation of God’s moral character is the ultimate basis for ethics.

In other words, divine agency in effecting participation initiates and necessitates human agency in imitation. Verses 20 and 21 make it clear that all of this takes place within the compass of God’s eternal providence.

Marshall (1991:91) considers 1 Peter 2:21 the “theological centre” of the book. It is lodged in the heart of the specifically ethical part of the letter, in a section devoted to ordering various relationships. Indeed, on first reading it appears to apply narrowly to slaves, but it soon becomes obvious that it transcends the particular and “provides the basis for all Christian behaviour” (Marshall, 1991:91; cf. Jobes, 2005:187–188).

Slaves in particular, and Christians in general, are *called* (v. 21) to do good, suffer for it, and endure (v. 20). The reason presented in verse 21 is twofold. First, “Christ suffered for you”. This is a statement of the substitutionary atoning agency of Christ by which he opens a new way of

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<sup>85</sup> Jobes (2005:112) describes this conformity as being “defined by, and derived from, the character of God”.

life, itself marked by suffering for doing good. Second, “Christ suffered... leaving you an example”. Christ is the “true model” (Jobes, 2005:188). In other words, Christ’s suffering is both the means and the pattern; it is both atoning and exemplary (Green, 2007:83, 85). The former is unrepeatable (“once for all”, 1 Pet. 3:18; NASB). The latter directly demands “repetition” of some sort. The nature of that repetition is informed by Peter’s choice of language. The word translated “example” in the ESV, ὑπογραμμός, was used in antiquity to describe “the outlines of a sketch the artist fills in w. detail” (Rogers & Rogers, 1998:573). With this meaning in mind, Green (2007:84) offers “performance” as a metaphor for imitation. Performance requires basic fidelity to a script, but also creativity in bringing it to life. Similarly, imitation requires basic fidelity to Christ’s example, but that example is given unique expression within the contingencies of a particular Christian life.

Verse 21 has the additional interest of connecting the language of imitation (ὑπογραμμός) with the language of discipleship (ἐπακολουθήσητε; Green, 2007:84): “leaving you an *example*, so that you might *follow* in his steps.” In fact, Louw and Nida (1989:41D) register the cognates ἐπακολουθέω and ἐξακολουθέω within the semantic domain of the imitation behaviour word group. Thus the idea of imitation is present in both the “example” and the “following” of verse 21. A semantic cluster of this nature strengthens the argument that the idea of imitation is prevalent in the New Testament, even if the specific lexicon of imitation is relatively scarce.

In 1 Peter 2:22–25 the apostle borrows language from Isaiah 53 to expound the theological significance of Christ’s atoning agency. On the basis of the imagery he uses in verses 24–25 (resurrection, healing and return), Green (2007:89, incl. fn. 63) concludes that Peter is presenting an ontological model of atonement rather than a forensic model. This is especially noteworthy since Torrance’s ontological model of atonement appears to exclude or ignore the possibility of imitation, whereas Green clearly thinks the two are entirely compatible. He draws that conclusion, not least, on the basis of his exegesis of 1 Peter 2:21–25.

First Peter 4:1–2 is the third major Christological text in 1 Peter (Green, 2007:121). That we have dealt with the other two already (1:18–21; 2:22–25) is noteworthy in that it highlights how close in proximity passages concentrating on the being and agency of Christ are to the call to imitation. First Peter 4:1–2 stands at the centre of a chiasm spanning 3:18 to 4:6. The bookends of the chiasm refer to the life-giving agency of Christ (3:18) and the life-giving agency of the Spirit (4:6). At the centre of the chiasm is the call to live according to God’s will (Green, 2007:121).

The call is made in language similar to what we encountered in Philippians 2 (Green, 2007:136). In both passages, believers are called to imitate Christ’s attitude or pattern of thought. Specifically, this is a call to imitate “Christ’s willingness to suffer” (Grudem, 1988:174; Jobes, 2005:266). Once again (v. 2), this involves the eschewing of human desire (1 Pet. 4:2; cf. 1 Pet. 1:14 and the

comment above) for the sake of Christ's exemplary submission to the will of God as the object of conformity. Green (2007:136; emphasis added) notes that in verse 5 the parallel with Philippians 2 extends to "include the notion of Christian *participation* in the way of Jesus Christ through suffering to vindication and exaltation." We can conclude that imitation is a means to deepening our experience of participation.

- *Participation in the Petrine corpus*

We turn now to a number of passages in the Petrine corpus that affirm union with Christ or participation. First Peter 3:16 refers to "your good behaviour *in Christ*" (emphasis mine). Spiritual union with Christ is probably implied, but not to the absolute exclusion of imitation. The noun *ἀναστροφή* (translated "behavior" in the ESV) can refer to "pattern of life" (Grudem, 1988:162). Is it reasonable to assume that such a pattern forged in a participatory fellowship with Christ has not itself been patterned by his pattern? Green (2007:116; emphasis mine) affirms the contrary: "This is life defined here and throughout the letter in Christological terms, with focussed reference to the redemptive *and exemplary* journey of Jesus..." It is also important to notice, once again, the reference in verse 17 to God's providential will, overruling the interplay of divine and human agency in history.

The last word of 1 Peter is a verse that would lend itself to Torrance's doctrine of theosis (1 Pet. 5:10; emphasis mine):

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has *called you to his eternal glory in Christ*, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Of this verse, Grudem (1988:205; emphasis mine) comments:

... God is the God who has called you to (or 'into', eis) his eternal glory in Christ. That is the realm that really counts, for it lasts for ever. In that realm, the manifold excellence of God's character is given spectacular expression in his eternal glory—something that ordinarily would cause us to remain distant in fearful awe. Yet God has decided that we should not remain distant, but that we should be *summoned into the midst of his own glory*—yes, even that we should come in Christ (i.e. in union with Christ) *to share in it*...

This is at least participation, if not theosis. The last word in a book littered with calls to imitation is a word of participation.

- *Exegesis (2 Peter)*

The last word in 1 Peter is a close anticipation of the first word in 2 Peter. Indeed, Bauckham (1990:53) considers 2 Peter 1:3–11 a summary of the Petrine message outlined in 1 Peter. The grammatical structure (Leedy, 2006:ad loc.) and logic of verses 3–5 is very instructive. Divine agency enables all things pertaining to life and godliness (human agency). It does so through the knowledge of the one who calls us (divine agency) to “his own glory and excellence” (v. 3). Green (1987:81) views the latter phrase as signalling “one of the major themes of his First Epistle... the imitation of Christ.” In verse 4 we return to divine agency. Through “his own glory and excellence”, Christ grants us the fulfilment of his promises, that is, participation in his divine nature. In the words of Green again (1987:83; emphasis mine), “The divine virtue and transcendent goodness manifested in Jesus *both constitute and validate* the call to come and participate in the divine nature.” Divine agency enables human agency in imitation for the sake of participation in the divine nature. Imitation serves the goal of participation. As in 1 Peter 5:10, so also here: a passage so amenable to Torrance’s doctrine of theosis has imitation embedded in it, though it is doubtful Torrance would allow for such an interpretation.

#### **4.2.10.3 Summary and conclusion**

First and Second Peter reinforce conclusions drawn from other passages, but with their own unique contributions. Once again we see the thorough integration of divine agency and human agency, of participation and imitation. That said, the Petrine Epistles add much nuance to our understanding of imitation. In the first place, the overwhelming focus of imitation in these letters is suffering. It is not the glory and power of Christ that is to be imitated; it is his willingness to endure for the sake of obedience. Moreover, the nature of imitation is a basic fidelity to this example of Christ, not a fastidious attempt to reproduce the details of his life and ignore the details of our own. Also, in 1 Peter, imitation connects explicitly with discipleship, and this greatly extends the prevalence of the concept of imitation in the New Testament. Finally, it is worth remarking on the proximity of the language and ideas of divine providence to the language and ideas of human agency in imitation. This will prove a fruitful avenue of reflection later on.

Apart from these general conclusions, this brief study of 1 and 2 Peter has raised a few issues of direct bearing on the theology of Thomas Torrance. It raised the possibility of compatibility between an ontological model of atonement and the doctrine of imitation. It also raised the possibility of compatibility between the doctrine of theosis and the doctrine of imitation. Both stand as a challenge to Torrance’s basic position. These are significant contributions.

## 4.2.11 The letters of John

### 4.2.11.1 The text

#### Nestle–Aland (2012)

<sup>5</sup> ... ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἔσμεν.

<sup>6</sup> ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν ὀφείλει, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν, καὶ αὐτὸς οὕτως περιπατεῖν.

<sup>2</sup> ἀγαπητοὶ νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἔσμεν, καὶ οὐπω ἐφανερώθη τί ἐσόμεθα. οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἐὰν φανερωθῆ, ὅμοιοι αὐτῷ ἐσόμεθα, ὅτι ὁψόμεθα αὐτόν, καθὼς ἐστίν.

<sup>3</sup> καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἔχων τὴν ἐλπίδα ταύτην ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἀγνίζει ἑαυτόν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος ἀγνός ἐστίν.

<sup>7</sup> Παιδιά, μηδεὶς πλανᾷ ὑμᾶς· ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην δίκαιός ἐστίν, καθὼς ἐκεῖνος δίκαιός ἐστίν.

<sup>8</sup> ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστίν, ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ὁ διάβολος ἁμαρτάνει. εἰς τοῦτο ἐφανερώθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα λύσῃ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου.

<sup>11</sup> Ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἣν ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους,

<sup>12</sup> οὐ καθὼς Κάϊν ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἦν καὶ ἔσφαξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ· καὶ χάριν τίνος ἔσφαξεν αὐτόν; ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν, τὰ δὲ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια.

<sup>11</sup> Ἀγαπητέ, μὴ μιμοῦ τὸ κακὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν. ὁ ἀγαθοποιῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν· ὁ κακοποιῶν οὐχ ἐώρακεν τὸν θεόν.

#### English Standard Version (2016)

<sup>5</sup> ... By this we may know that we are in him:

<sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1 John 2:5b-6)

<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

<sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

<sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

<sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:7-8)

<sup>11</sup> For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

<sup>12</sup> We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. (1 John 3:11-12)

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. (3 John 11)

### 4.2.11.2 Analysis

- *Introduction and context*

First, Second and Third John were written in the last decade of the first century AD by the apostle John to local churches and church leaders in Ephesus. He was writing to combat a complex matrix of false teaching surrounding the person and work of Christ. The false teaching was creating profound doctrinal and ethical confusion within the churches and had already resulted in division. In his letters John corrects this false teaching by presenting Jesus Christ, faith in him, and the love and obedience that will necessarily follow (Carson & Moo, 2005:669-682; Jobes, 2014:37).

- *Exegesis (1 John)*

Our interpretation of 1 John 2:6 hangs on the meaning of the infinitive μένειν, most commonly translated “to abide” or “to remain”. This is the first of twenty uses of μένω and its cognates in 1 John (Derickson, 2014:154, 723), and calling his readers to abide in God through Christ is arguably the major motivation of John’s letters (Jobes, 2014:88). In John’s Gospel the verb is used of the promise of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15–21), of the metaphor of the vine and the branches (John 15:1–6), and of the nexus of relationships described in the upper room discourse (John 13–17). In John’s letters it is used of mutual abiding of the Triune God and believers (e.g., 1 John 2:24; 3:2–3, 24; 4:12; Derickson, 2014:155; Jobes, 2014:87–88). If Jobes (2014:88) is correct in assuming a New Covenant background to the use of the verb (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36), then the mutual indwelling of God and believer by the Holy Spirit through union with Christ is almost certainly in view. However, the implication for the meaning of μένω is contested.

The question of abiding in verse 6 is introduced by a test phrase in verse 5b: “By this we may know that we are in him”. There are those who advocate that this phrase and those like it in John’s letters are a ‘test of life’ (positional righteousness and justification), against others who contend that they are a ‘test of fellowship’ (experiential righteousness and sanctification) (Derickson, 2014:315). This is the heart of the debate over the meaning of μένω – the former implies a meaning of “abide” that concentrates on spiritual union, the latter on relational health. But to limit the interpretation in this way is, to my mind, to commit the fallacy of the excluded middle – there is no reason why these two positions should not be integrated. Verse 5b can be read as a test of life and fellowship. “Abide” in verse 6 can carry the meaning of spiritual union and relational health, since the latter emerges out of the former. Indeed, this is where Derickson (2014:733) ends up, even as an advocate of the fellowship test:

John’s use of μένω expresses the concept of reciprocal relationships (fellowship) *that grow out of mutual indwelling*... between God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and believers. (Emphasis mine)

Thus, there is considerable overlap between the concepts of “abiding” and “participation”.

What then is the test of abiding? If one claims to “abide in him” (v. 6), then one is obligated to walk as he walked. There must be integrity between the claim and the conduct. As we have seen repeatedly, walk refers to the general orientation of all of life (cf. Yarbrough, 2008:88). Indeed, “even the cross and Jesus’ filial consciousness have important analogies in the Christian life”, but these are to be duplicated after the pattern “*mutatis mutandis*” (Yarbrough, 2008:88). The one who claims to abide must walk καθὼς ἐκεῖνος. This lexical combination appears repeatedly in John’s letters. Three of those passages we review here. The pairing conveys a strong connotation

of imitation.<sup>86</sup> Καθώς is an adverbial conjunction with comparative force (Derickson, 2014:315). It is so frequently deployed by John in his Gospel and letters to move believers to imitation of Christ that Painter refers to a Johannine “*kathōs ethic*” (cited in Derickson, 2014:156).<sup>87</sup> The demonstrative pronoun ἐκεῖνος is used for emphasis: it is this Jesus who is your example (Derickson, 2014:156). Stott (1988:96) captures the overall effect of these verses plainly: “We cannot claim to live in him unless we behave like him.” In other words, claims to participation oblige the evidence of imitation. In real participation there will be integrity between claims to Christ and a conduct conformed to Christ.

In 1 John 3 our first focus is on verse 3, although verse 2 provides indispensable context. Verse 2 can easily be interpreted in support of a doctrine of theosis. At the very least, “the coming of Jesus will complete the redemptive work that the incarnation inaugurated” (Yarbrough, 2008:179). The hope this generates for believers in the present will cause them to purify themselves “καθώς ἐκεῖνος ἄγνός ἐστιν” (“as he is pure”, 1 John 3:3). The καθώς ἐκεῖνος construction once again signals imitation of Jesus Christ. The combination of the indicative present active form of the verb ἀγνίζω and the reflexive pronoun affirms the agency of the believer such that “this is a work done *by* the believer, not *to* the believer” (Derickson, 2014:288; emphasis original).<sup>88</sup> Believers participating in Christ in the present (“we are God’s children now”, v. 2a) are to exercise agency imitating him (v. 3) in anticipation of full participation and likeness when he returns (v. 2b). This type of reasoning in the early verses of chapter 3 prompts Yarbrough (2008:186) to label the imitation of Christ “both hope and mandate”.

The καθώς ἐκεῖνος construction occurs in 1 John 3:7, where once again the implication is that “Christ’s righteousness furnishes an ethical and character norm for his followers” (Yarbrough, 2008:179). In the following verse, John presents the antithesis by way of negative example: the devil.<sup>89</sup> The reference in verse 8 to the devil’s sin *from the beginning* prompts Jobes (2014:146) to issue an important warning by way of analogy. The nature of the temptation the devil presented to Adam and Eve *in the beginning* was an opportunity to “become like God” (Gen. 3:5). It was the offer of divine likeness without dependence or obedience. Thus, the essence of sin is a perverse form of imitation. This may explain the reticence of Torrance and other Protestant thinkers to adopt the language of imitation, albeit a biblical taxonomy. The warning stands: imitation apart from participation is essentially sin. Be that as it may, verse 7 functions as a call to imitate Jesus,

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<sup>86</sup> Derickson (2014:156), Jobes (2014:86), Stott (1988:96) and Yarbrough (2008:87–88) are unanimous that 1 John 2:6 is a call to imitation.

<sup>87</sup> Paul makes similar use of καθώς in Ephesians (see 4.2.5 above).

<sup>88</sup> Note the importance of the holiness theme and language in 4.2.1 above.

<sup>89</sup> In verse 12, Cain is offered as a second example of the “*via negativa*” (Yarbrough, 2008:180).

the archetype of integrated character and conduct. The call to imitate comes in the context of participation (v. 9: “born of God”).<sup>90</sup>

- *Exegesis (3 John)*

The only imperative of 3 John comes in the verse which contains the central thesis of the letter (Jobes, 2014:321–322):

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, *do not imitate* evil but *imitate* good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. (3 John 11; emphasis mine)

Given the immediately adjacent ethical evaluation of Diotrephes’ conduct, it is reasonable to assume, following Derickson (2014:693), that the adjectives in verse 11a refer to people rather than to evil and good in abstract. And, given John’s application of the phrase “from God” (ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ) to Jesus Christ (John 7:17; 8:42; 1 John 5:18), it is also fair to deduce that he is *ultimately* commanding the imitation of Christ. Moreover, to imitate the one from God requires that you yourself are from God (v. 11b). Imitation is premised on participation. Imitation is evidence of participation (Derickson, 2014:695).

#### **4.2.11.3 Summary and conclusion**

Besides adding to the general weight of evidence, John’s letters make three salient contributions to this discussion. First, in 1 John 2:6 we have one of the strongest statements of the integrated nature of participation and imitation on record. To paraphrase that verse: “If you participate, you will imitate”. Or on a slightly weaker but no less compelling version: “If you participate, you must imitate”. Second, imitation is so widespread in the Johannine corpus as to induce references to a “*kathōs ethic*”. Third, the mention of the devil’s perversion of imitation right at the beginning suggested by 1 John 3:8 stands as a stark warning: we must never divorce imitation from participation in Christ. It is a fitting note on which to conclude this analysis.

#### **4.3 Chapter summary and conclusion**

The goal of this chapter was to present a biblical perspective on agency in the function and relation of participation and imitation. To that end I have examined ten passages that serve as evidence of a wider biblical dynamic.

The holiness and *halakah* motifs were selected for their prevalence and prominence in the Old Testament and in biblical theology at large. Together they capture the essence of the Old

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<sup>90</sup> There are similar calls to imitation made in 1 John 3:16 and 4:11.

Testament ethic. Together they surface a number of interesting observations regarding participation, imitation and agency.

Both Leviticus and Deuteronomy call for human agency in imitation within the context of divine agency. In Leviticus an early picture of the nature of imitation begins to emerge. The holiness motif demonstrates that there is a qualitative difference in the attributes of God and our imitation of them. Ours is a defective, derived and dependent representation that functions as a mere witness to the Holy Object of our imitation. We discover that while imitation serves participation by continually drawing God's people into his presence, imitation cannot create or recreate that presence. On the other hand, given the imperatives, participation necessitates imitation.

The call to walk and, therefore, to imitate is all-inclusive. It is a total claim to all of human life and agency. Deuteronomy 10 calls for agency in unexpected places relating to the salvation of Israel – a pattern we also see repeated in the New Testament. In Deuteronomy (as in the New Testament) this call to agency in imitation is totally rooted in the being and agency of God.

The transition into the New Testament reveals more continuity than discontinuity. In 1 Corinthians participation very much remains the context for imitation. Imitation, on the other hand, is seen to require habitual action. The modelling of imitation can be mediated by those who themselves faithfully imitate Christ (the chain of imitation in 1 Corinthians, for example, runs from the Corinthians to Timothy, to Paul, before it is finally anchored in Christ). Paul deploys the Deuteronomic *halakah* extensively in 1 Corinthians (and throughout Ephesians as well). Under the motif of “walking”, Scripture has a mediating role in relation to imitation. An exegesis of the Lord's Supper account in 1 Corinthians 10 shows that participation in its fullness both instantiates and demands the imitation of Christ. On the whole, 1 Corinthians teaches that true imitation exists only in union with Christ, and the full realisation of participation requires imitation.

The exegesis of Galatians 2 and 4 showed that in the relation of Christian agency to the agency of Christ, that which Torrance relegates to miracle and mystery is to some extent grounded and revealed by an understanding of imitation. The fact that union with Christ does not obliterate Christian agency can to some extent be accounted for by imitation, in which agency is exercised in a manner that does not violate participation, but rather expresses and deepens it.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians stands out for the sheer weight of evidence integrating divine and human agency, participation and imitation. It exhibits an unusual coincidence of participation and imitation, whether in concept or explicit language. The letter teaches that imitation should be worthy of participation and should include attributes like humility, gentleness, patience and love. It also teaches that participation is the only basis for imitation. Ephesians leaves no room for

independent moral agency. Indeed, Paul warns against exercising agency in imitation in a direction that would deny Christian identity and risk participation in darkness. There is also the nexus of participation with discipleship and image-of-God language. The latter two suggest a prevalence of the imitation concept that is wider than the appearance of specific imitation language. In all, Ephesians presents a profound integration of participation and imitation.

The exegesis of Philippians adds evidentiary weight to Webster's primarily theological argument for imitation. Like Deuteronomy, imitation in Philippians is applied even to the unlikely arena of salvation. Philippians 2:12–13 show just how closely divine agency and human agency are related as cause and effect in the Christian life, all of which is overruled by the providential will of God. In a book of examples, we find that the way to participate in Christ is to imitate him. Imitation is a means of living out our participation. Imitation informs the shape of the life lived in Christ.

In 1 and 2 Thessalonians we discover the importance of imitation to Paul. Given his cultural context and the fact that his churches did not yet have a New Testament to guide them, imitation was a vital doctrine from early in the apostle's ministry. In these letters we learn how imitation functions as evidence of participation. We learn of the nature of imitation as the impress of one life upon another in discipleship. We encounter a prominent focus of imitation in a willingness to suffer and endure as Christ did.

The Pastorals give insight into imitation by viewing it 'from the other side', that is, from the side of modelling. The Pastorals describe the deeply relational nature of modelling and imitation. They also expound the extensive scope of modelling and imitation to include all of life in Christ. The scope is matched by the intensity of the agency required to deepen participation through the imitation of Christ. Once again, that agency is applied to the outworking of salvation. Once again, we note the importance of Scripture as a mediator in imitation.

A brief consideration of the chronology of Paul's letters shows little development in his conception of participation, imitation and agency. If anything, the apostle grew in the boldness and directness of his call to the churches to imitate Christ as they participate in him.

Perhaps more than any other part of the New Testament, in 1 and 2 Peter the focus of imitation is on Christ's willingness to suffer and endure for the sake of obedience. In these letters, the nature of imitation is revealed as less of an obsession with detail and more of an adherence to the shape of Jesus' earthly life. The link between imitation and discipleship is more explicit here than anywhere else. All of these features are presented within the framework of divine providence. Finally, 1 and 2 Peter present something of a challenge to Torrance's model in that they simultaneously allow for imitation and an ontological model of atonement, and for imitation and a

doctrine of theosis. It is doubtful whether Torrance himself would assent to compatibility in those areas.

John's letters make a strong statement of the integration of participation and imitation, affirm the widespread usage of imitation by the apostle, and issue a strong warning against the abuse of imitation as an independent enterprise.

If we draw these many strands together, we reach one overarching conclusion: in the Bible participation and imitation are often profoundly integrated. Each is indispensable to a full and faithful account of the other. If Torrance wishes to make the strongest case he possibly can for a participationist ethic, his case must include imitation. It does not. At best, we find a reticence for the language and concept of imitation. As for Webster, his shortcoming is not fully recognising or acknowledging the breadth and depth of the evidentiary basis for the integration of participation and imitation. Where participation is the ground, the basis, the constitution, the hope, the means, the cause, the context, the motivation, etc. of the Christian life, imitation is the outworking, the evidence, the effect, the demand, the manner, the mandate, the pattern, the expression, etc. This implies that human being and agency are real, but are nonetheless embedded in, subsisting on, deriving from, and utterly dependent on divine being and agency. If this is an accurate biblical perspective, it is a significant challenge to Torrance's model. We explore the nature of that challenge in the final chapter, which follows.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary of findings

#### 5.1.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to summarise the findings of the previous chapters, to collate those findings, and to bring them to bear in a final assessment of whether the central theoretical argument of this thesis has been made convincingly, and of whether the aim of this thesis has been met. I also add some reflections that follow from these conclusions.<sup>91</sup>

#### 5.1.2 Chapter 1: Introduction

In chapter 1, we began by noting how the modern era has driven a wedge between theology and ethics. **Thomas Torrance** argues that this is merely a recent manifestation of an old problem with its roots in early Western theology – a problem he labels **the Latin heresy**. The basis of the Latin heresy is an epistemological and theological instinct towards dualism. It is the habit of dividing that which is, in reality, naturally integrated. It stands to reason that his solution is one of reintegration. For Torrance, in epistemology, theology, and ethics, reintegration is achieved by focussing on the objective person of Christ. In ethics, believers live out the Christian life by participating in the righteous life of Christ through spiritual union.

Critics like **Webster** have argued that Torrance's doctrine of participation ignores the biblical teaching on imitation and threatens to void Christian agency of any shape or meaning. On the other hand, Webster argues that the doctrine of imitation is necessary to a full account of the Christian life and Christian ethics. The gap between Torrance and critics like Webster is the heart of the research problem this study has sought to address. The research questions centred on the function and relation of agency in participation and in imitation. The questions were applied to Torrance, his critics (represented by Webster), his sources, and finally the Bible. The aim was to arrive at a biblical perspective on participation, imitation and agency, with Thomas Torrance and his interlocutors as conversation partners. The central theoretical argument, stated in chapter 1, was that the Bible holds agency in participation and in imitation in close relation. This is a significant advance on Torrance's model of participation. This central theoretical argument was substantiated in chapters 2–4.

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<sup>91</sup> This chapter is a summary, and therefore citation has been reserved for new material that has not been previously cited. For full citation, please refer back to the relevant chapters.

### 5.1.3 Chapter 2: Torrance and Webster

The objective of chapter 2 was to describe how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in the theology of Thomas Torrance. The same objective was applied to the theology of John Webster, as a representative critic, with a view to better understanding Torrance by way of contrast and critique.

The chapter began with Torrance's sources. **The Greek fathers** profoundly influenced Torrance's methodological framework. Athanasius and the Three Hierarchs of the Eastern church affirmed the radical contingency of the universe, rooted in both its created and fallen natures. Any relation between the universe and its Creator-Redeemer God is constituted by the Word of God and is therefore a relation entirely of grace. This is true of cosmology, and also of epistemology. Jesus Christ assumed a human mind in order to heal it. In both creation and redemption, any true knowledge is knowledge by grace. Crucially for this study, Torrance notes how Chrysostom extended these cosmological and epistemological propositions to the moral order. Human morality is also radically contingent and in need of redemption. In his providence, God overrules the created order for the purpose of fellowship with human beings, in a way that does not nullify human moral agency and responsibility. By stressing radical contingency of humanity in cosmology, epistemology and morality, the Greek fathers made a decisive break with the ancient Greeks, who founded all things on what would later be called the analogy of being. Where the ancient Greeks took the necessity of creation and its eternal coexistence with God as axiomatic, the Greek fathers took radical contingency as axiomatic. Torrance follows suit: radical contingency is at the heart of his cosmology, epistemology and morality. Radical contingency of the created order is thus at the heart of his method. It is a divide bridged only in the person of Christ. All of that said, as was noted in chapter 2, Torrance does not fully integrate all the elements of Chrysostom's doctrine of providence into his account of divine and human agency, nor does he acknowledge the concept of imitation in Chrysostom's ethics. These omissions are significant for our purposes.

Athanasius's chief endowment to Torrance's method and content was his integration of method and content, with both centring on the person of Christ. In his epistemology, **Athanasius** was a realist. He adopted the principle of *κατὰ φύσιν* ("according to nature"), which places the onus in knowing on the self-disclosure of the object of inquiry. In the process of inquiry, a pattern of truth emerges which then serves as the controlling factor for further inquiry. For Athanasius, in the knowledge of God, the incarnation emerges as the pattern of truth and the controlling factor. The incarnate Christ is both the 'how?' and the 'who?' of knowing God. We know the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. We encounter God as Son, and therefore we know God as Father, Son

and Spirit. Moreover, as the Creator Logos who has entered into creation, he gives all creation its intelligible structure. The Word is thus the ground of human knowledge in general, and of the knowledge of God in particular.

According to Torrance, in all this, Athanasius was navigating between a Platonic ultra-transcendence of God and an Aristotelean/Stoic ultra-immanence of God. The Greek father argued instead for the transcendence of God in being and the immanence of God in providence. And through the “inhomination of the Word, the universal Providence has been made known” (Athanasius quoted in Torrance, 1975:223). Thus, we know God not through actualisation of innate creaturely divinity, nor through isolated creaturely independence, but through participation by the grace of God in Christ. The hypostatic self-communication of God in Christ is simultaneously a denial of ontological monism and of the resulting cosmological (soul vs matter) or epistemological (intelligible vs sensible) dualisms. Once again, the incarnation is the integrating key to the method and content of his theology. For Torrance, it is also the key to Athanasius’s understanding of human agency in the Christian life. The Christian life is an in-Spirited participation in the agency of the incarnate Son, who is in himself the vicarious response of humanity to God the Father. It is participation by grace in the righteous agency of the incarnate Son. Such is the influence of Athanasius on Torrance, although it must be reiterated here that Torrance’s reading of Athanasius is criticised at several important points.

According to Torrance, **Barth** is similar to Athanasius in his integrating approach. Indeed, Torrance places Barth in a theological trajectory that runs from Irenaeus through Athanasius and Calvin. Like those great thinkers, Barth stressed the indivisible oneness of divine being and agency captured in the term *homoousion*. He stressed it over against a partitive, dualistic habit of mind that allowed for only external relations between the Son and the Father, between the Word and God, and ultimately between Christ and the Christian. This is what Torrance labelled the “Latin heresy”. He traces the theological trajectory of the Latin heresy from Tertullian through Arius, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and into the contemporary church, both Catholic and Protestant. Barth encountered it primarily in the area of revelation. Barth taught that “God’s revelation is God himself”. He taught this as a counter to the prevailing tendency to separate God from his revelation where the latter is abstracted from the biblical corpus into first principles and formalised into an external system of propositional truth. For Barth the truth came not by abstraction, but by spiritual union with Christ. The Bible mediates the ongoing self-communication of God, who is both Revealer and Revelation.

Barth goes on to integrate revelation and reconciliation by basing both on relations internal to God himself. Revelation and reconciliation involve human access into the Father–Son relation in the

Spirit and by grace. To achieve this involves a further integration: the integration of the incarnation and the atonement, or the person and work of Christ. For Barth, both are achieved by the hypostatic union, such that Christ is, in himself, an atoning incarnation, or an incarnational atonement. Jesus Christ does not mediate divine revelation or divine reconciliation – he *is* both. He is both, simultaneously. The revelation of God in the incarnate Son is itself a reconciliation – Jesus Christ had to assume a sinful human nature in order to heal it. Moreover, he is not merely the movement of God to man; he is also, as our substitute and representative, the perfect response of man to God. Christ entering into humanity in order to effect a total substitution (God as man for man) in an ontological atonement – this, according to Torrance, was Barth’s response to the Latin heresy, which separated revelation from reconciliation, the incarnation from the atonement, and the person from the work of Christ.

Barth’s concept of *total substitution* had a profound impact on his conception of the Christian life. The Christian life is one of participation in Christ. He acts in our place in the human response to God. The agency is his. We participate in him. Torrance refuses to accept the critics’ charge that this obliterates Christian agency. That, for Torrance, is a rationalism typical of the Latin heresy. And on his understanding, Barth has adequately diagnosed and refuted the Latin heresy. Of course, we noted once again that Torrance’s understanding is not without its own critics.

Torrance’s brand of critical realism was heavily influenced by **Michael Polanyi**. Polanyi argued that belief is objectively, not subjectively grounded; that belief is a basic conviction that arises in our minds compulsorily (but not necessarily) under the self-communication of the object; and that the formation and function of belief takes place within a developing framework of belief and tradition. These three premises led him to his basic conclusion that all knowledge rests upon faith (i.e., belief).

Torrance applied Polanyi’s epistemological framework to the Christian framework of belief. That belief is objectively grounded means that faith is a response to an inherent intelligibility in reality, and faith is grounded in the objective pole of the knowledge relationship. Thus, in the language of the New Testament, faith is a listening obedience evoked by the Word of God. That belief arises compulsorily in our minds means faith is a free response anchored in the faithfulness of God, in which it originates and is sustained. That the framework of belief and tradition is advanced in community stresses the importance of participation to the knowledge of God. The process of participation or indwelling is one of gracious integration via meditation and worship in which access into the communion of God is freely granted. Torrance describes indwelling (participation) as concentration on an object in order to “interiorise” that object until there is “structural kinship” between the knower and the known. This could easily be considered the language of an epistemological call to imitation, though Torrance would probably disagree. Torrance favours

Polanyi's framework as an appropriate challenge to the neo-Platonic, dualistic and subjectively located framework of belief that to his mind has corrupted Christian thought in general, and Christian thought on the Christian life in particular. The Christian life is one of participation in the objective reality of Christ.

Torrance focusses on the same problem (dualism) and offers the same solution (participation) in the first of the three works surveyed in chapter 2. In the *Mediation of Christ*, Torrance attacks the pervasive effects of dualistic thinking in Christian theology. The consequence is that Christ himself is abstracted from his relation to his Father, his relation to Israel, and his relation to the Christian church. Torrance's remedy is, in the first place, an application of the epistemology of Athanasius, Barth and Polanyi. It involves submitting to an object of inquiry in the nexus of its relations (i.e., without abstraction) until the intrinsic logic of those relations emerges. Torrance argues that in theological, Christological, or soteriological inquiry, it is the incarnation that emerges as the inner logic the inquirer seeks. The incarnate Christ is both the method and the message. He mediates both revelation and reconciliation. In his person, Jesus Christ is the integration of what the Latin heresy disintegrates: the Father and the Son; the Son and Israel; Christ and the Christian. Because Jesus Christ in his person is the movement of God to man and the movement of man to God, he sets the moral order on an entirely new basis: Christ himself. The righteousness of the Christian is a participation in the perfect, obedient relation of the Son to the Father by the Spirit.

In the *Royal Priesthood*, Torrance uses the Old Testament priesthood as a foundation for understanding the relation of being and agency in the priesthood of Christ to that of his church. Torrance identifies in the Old Testament priesthood two offices: the mediation of the Word of God to the people; and the mediation of their response in a liturgy of obedience and thanksgiving. This establishes the pattern of Christ's relation to the church. Christ fulfils both priestly offices in his person. He is both the Word of God to man, and the response of man to God. The church participates in his perfect priestly response of obedience and thanksgiving. The church's response is therefore merely "signitive"; it is a witness to the response of Christ. Torrance rejects Platonic imitation on the grounds that it goes beyond this signitive relation and implies some form of hypostatic transcription or repetition of the righteousness of Christ. Torrance explicitly rejects imitation in favour of participation. Nevertheless, in description and translation he struggles to avoid the language and concept of imitation. Moreover, at one point he seems to argue, perhaps unwittingly, that some form of imitation is in fact necessary to participation. Thus, in *Royal Priesthood* we discovered something of an internal tension in Torrance's characterisation of imitation, and in the relation of imitation to participation.

In “**Cheap and costly grace**”, Torrance explores the interplay of Christology, soteriology and ethics. He does that in two parts, the first part focussing on justification, the second on grace. He begins by noting that the Protestant doctrine of a “justifying faith” has introduced a subtle element of co-redemption in a grace conditional on human faith and repentance. Torrance sees the error rooted in an early-Reformation dualistic tendency to separate the work of Christ from his person. Consequently, the atonement was separated from the incarnation, Christ’s substitution from his representation, and, finally, the being and agency of the Christian from the being and agency of Christ. At that point, the gospel was moralised. Following this trajectory, in modern Protestantism, under the influence of **Bultmann** et al., Christian ethics was reduced to subjective existential decision. Against this backdrop, Torrance argues for a “relentless objectivity” which focusses on the person of Christ and *his* decision to take responsibility as a man for mankind. Justification is by grace alone and is a participation in the righteousness of Christ. It is an impartation of Christ’s righteousness before it is an imputation of Christ’s righteousness. It is ontological and objective before it is forensic and subjective. For Torrance, Christ is the objective centre of the Christian life.

In the second part, Torrance considers the cost of grace. Grace is costly because it implies the end of all human merit. Whatever Christian agency Torrance allows for, it is not an agency unto independent merit apart from Christ. Christ is the objective centre from which we live. We must “let Christ be everything”. Even as Torrance advocates this radical objectivity, he refuses to concede the charge that it spells the end of human agency. At this point he appeals to **Bonhoeffer**. In his life and his doctrine, Bonhoeffer understood himself free to bear responsibility precisely because his justification was a reality located objectively in the person of Christ, and not contingent on his own decisions. Bonhoeffer understood the relation between divine and human being and agency in terms of two levels that are distinct but inseparable. This is no retreat into another dualism, since the interface between the two is the incarnate Christ. Hence the relation is one of grace alone. By the grace of God in Christ, man is free and responsible to live his life out of the objective reality of Christ, for the sake of God and others. Participation in the objective reality of Christ is exactly what Torrance affirms. Integral to his affirmation of participation is a rejection, or at least an avoidance, of imitation.

Finally, we turned to Torrance’s call for a “**soteriological suspension of ethics**”. Torrance argues that the Greek dualistic instincts pervading much of Western theology resulted in the separation of the work of Christ from his person. Consequently, theories of atonement multiplied even as atonement itself was largely restricted to the moral order. The remedy, for Torrance, was twofold. First, we must acknowledge the universal reach of the atonement. Second, we must look to Christ as the one who overcomes all dualisms in himself. A universal atonement envelopes the

moral order, and a focus on the person of Christ replaces an external, forensic understanding of atonement with an ontological understanding of atonement, or an atonement that reaches the depths of our being. The breadth and depth of such an atonement in Christ provides an entirely new basis for the moral order. It is this transformation of the entire moral order that prompts Torrance to announce a “soteriological suspension of ethics”. Rather than conformity to an external standard or the imperatives of law, the Christian lives out the filial relation of the Son to the Father and is thus governed by the indicatives of God’s love.

Torrance modified **Kierkegaard** in his call for a “soteriological suspension of ethics”. Kierkegaard’s original meaning sheds light on what Torrance was calling for. For Kierkegaard, the demand of the ethical is that the individual submit to the universal. That is the telos of the individual. The paradox of faith, however, is that the individual is justified above the ethical universal and in unmediated relation to God. For Kierkegaard this is a “teleological suspension of ethics”. Kierkegaard uses the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 as an example. In that story, Abraham is either a murderer or a man of faith. By the paradox of faith, Abraham transcends the universal ethical injunction against murder, in submission to a higher telos, namely, the will of God. This is what Kierkegaard means by a “teleological suspension of ethics”. We found, similarly, that when Torrance calls for a “soteriological suspension of ethics” he is calling for unmediated submission to the will of God via participation in Christ. Both men call for a suspension of ethics in favour of immediate submission to the will of God, albeit from opposite ends of the subjective–objective agency spectrum. We note here that there is no mention of imitation at this point in Torrance’s discussion, and it seems likely to me that he would suspend imitation as an external ethical norm, in favour of participation in the saving person of Christ.

The brief survey of three of Torrance’s works revealed that in his epistemology, Christology and soteriology there is a relentless objectivity centred on the person of Christ. The same impulse is extended to the Christian life in those works and in Torrance’s call for a “soteriological suspension of ethics”. In all this he either overtly rejects imitation or simply ignores it in favour of participation in Christ.

The rest of chapter 2 was given over to understanding Torrance by way of contrast with one of his critics, **John Webster**.

We began with Webster’s epistemology. For Webster, the proper objects in theology are God, and all things relative to God. Theology is the contemplation first of God in his immanent being, divine attributes and aseity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Only then, secondarily, and derivatively, is the consideration of all things relative to God in his economy appropriate. Moreover, the order of theology’s twofold object is irreversible. This serves as a reminder that the

principle object in theology is perpetually beyond its grasp, and the constant temptation is to shift attention to the secondary object. Webster argues that much of the modern theological enterprise has been a surrender to this temptation. He would probably include Torrance in that charge.

As far as theological knowledge is concerned, Webster does not concur with Torrance's critical realist emphasis on the object. Indeed, Webster explicitly criticises that approach. Instead, he argues for a relationship between God's knowledge of himself (archetypal knowledge, the objective principle) and regenerate human intelligence (ectypal knowledge, the subjective principle). The former is the ground and guarantee of the latter. The former invites the latter into a rational fellowship. Nevertheless, divine revelation reaches its telos in an activation of the subjective intellect. This epistemological principle points us to Webster's treatment of human agency in general. He is more overtly affirmative of a derivative though real human agency than is Torrance, on the grounds that an account of the full power of divine agency demands as much.

Webster's commitment to causal connections and logical systems; his strong separation of the intelligible and the sensible, form and matter, Revealer and revelation, archetypal and ectypal knowledge; his approval of the theological method of Augustine and Aquinas; his limiting view of the incarnation as partial and instrumental in revelation; and his associated questioning of the reality of the Creator–creature relation – all of these epistemological commitments open him to the charge of perpetuating the Latin heresy and therefore put him at serious odds with Torrance. They thereby place Torrance's own commitments in starker relief.

We discovered a similar catalogue of differences in the area of Christology. Webster's first principle is the aseity of the Triune God, along with the implied determination to retain the Creator–creature divide. This immediately renders Torrance's doctrine of theosis suspect. For Webster, instead of divinisation, the telos of salvation is creaturely renewal. The centre of Webster's systematic theology is the doctrine of God, whereas Torrance denounces systems and focusses on Christology. For Webster, Christology is an indispensable and widely distributed part of the whole, but it remains part of the whole. Because Webster is comfortable reasoning from effect back to cause, he is comfortable casting the incarnation as an instrument, an effect that bids us contemplate the eternal life of the Godhead. Many of these differences in Christology and soteriology Torrance would ascribe to Webster's dualistic habit of thought born of the Latin heresy. On the contrary, Webster would ascribe them to Torrance's over-zealous commitment to critical realism, Christological maximalism, a modern impatience with metaphysics, a refusal to exercise regenerate intelligence in reasoning from effects to causes, and so on. Whatever their roots, the differences between the two pass from epistemology through theology, Christology, and soteriology and into the doctrine of the Christian life.

We encountered this trajectory in Webster's conception of the Creator–creature relation. The relation is neither univocal nor reciprocal. It is real and constitutive on the side of the creation, but only conceptual on the side of the Creator. It is a relation of pure generosity on one side, and absolute subordination between categorically different agents on the other. Because God creates out of pure generosity for the sake of his creatures, they have intrinsic substance and power. Hence, for Webster, God's aseity is the ground for real human agency.

Webster conceives of justification as a work of the Triune God based on his perfect, righteous self-relation. The Spirit seals the restoration of righteous relationship won by the Son and purposed by the Father. Thus, in his soteriology, Webster overtly rejects a one-dimensional focus on participation in Christ or theosis as the only way of conceiving of the Redeemer–redeemed relation. He also explicitly rejects the accusation that an extrinsic, forensic relation is the only alternative. Instead he argues for a differentiated covenantal fellowship between the Triune God and the creaturely objects of his mercy. He believes the latter to be the biblical model.

Webster works out the differentiated relation between God and man in his ecclesiology. He follows Augustine and Aquinas in asserting God and his agency as real, the church and her agency as derivative realities. God is a self-moving movement; the church is a moved movement. God is the principal reality; the church is a proximate reality. The agency of God and the agency of the church are directly proportional such that God is the exemplary, efficient and final cause of the church and her agency. The being and agency of the church is embedded in the being and agency of God. Webster acknowledges that this model is open to the charge of idealism. To my mind, Torrance would almost certainly consider it a reiteration of the Latin heresy. Webster counters that those who lay the charge end up eliding the agency of God into the agency of the church, as part of the modern theological turn to history as principal reality, with its overblown emphasis on the incarnation. Using the incarnation to integrate divine and creaturely realities, as per Torrance, is to undermine the principal reality of God's aseity and the differentiated relation between God and man. Rather, the church is signitive in that her being and agency witness to the being and agency of God. It is interesting that Torrance and Webster arrive at this same conclusion, though from opposite approaches.

Webster works from two premises that Torrance would probably not contest: 1) The God who made us governs who we are; who we are governs what we do, and 2) Jesus Christ is the ontological foundation of the moral order, and, therefore, participation in Christ is the foundation of Christian agency. That said, Webster wants to know what room is left for such agency, given the compass of Christ's agency. He wants to know what the practical outworking of Christian agency might be. If Christian agency is constituted by the objective grace of God, what are we to

make of the biblical imperatives addressed to the subjective agency of man? He finds the resolution of these various tensions in the New Testament teaching on imitation.

Webster notes that the doctrine of imitation has been largely overlooked in Protestant tradition, mainly because of an exaggerated commitment to critical realism and the objective and finished work of Christ. In this brand of Protestantism, sanctification collapses into justification, ecclesiology into Christology, and ethics into soteriology. At this point, by his choice of language, Webster levels pointed and thinly veiled criticism at Torrance himself. Webster further contends that where imitation is ignored in this fashion, the Protestant account of Christian agency is elided into the agency of Christ and is therefore shapeless and void. On the contrary, an imitation embedded in participation and intrinsic to it is what holds the New Testament indicative and imperative together. The agency of Christ is not only on our behalf and in our place; it is also for our motivation and direction. Imitation embedded in participation will accommodate neither identity nor strict separation between the agency of Christ and the agency of the Christian. Rather, the relation is one of analogy or correspondence, such that human agency is utterly dependent but equally real and meaningful. Thus, for Webster, a biblical doctrine of imitation is vital to a full account of the agency of Christ, the agency of the Christian, and the relation between the two. It is necessary to a full account of participation.

We concluded the theological comparison between Torrance and Webster by noting that both were responding to the same problem in modern theology: the tendency to drive a wedge between God and his works. Torrance responded by emphasising the hypostatic union in the incarnation as an integrating force. Webster proposed the differentiated relation of grace preserving an ontological distinction between God and his creature. The two solutions end in different conceptions of Christian agency and the place of imitation in the Christian life.

#### **5.1.4 Chapter 3: Torrance's sources**

Chapter 3 set out to explore how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate in Torrance's sources. The goal was to test the validity of his appeal to those sources in making his case for participation, and in making his case without imitation.

We first considered his rejection of **Platonic mimesis**. Plato's doctrine of imitation proved to be complex. First, the imitation word group is distributed across his writings on cosmology, aesthetics and ethics. Second, there is interaction between the three usages, but the nature of that interaction is itself somewhat obscure. Third, in his ethical writings, like Torrance, Plato rejects a certain type of imitation. Unlike Torrance, he can conceive of a positive type of imitation, though to what extent he advocates it is once again unclear. Thus, the validity of Torrance's reading of

Plato is itself somewhat obscure, though we can clearly discern what Torrance is rejecting. He rejects ontological monism that issues in cosmological, epistemological and ultimately ethical dualism. He rejects imitation as actualisation of an independent, innate Christian righteousness. He rejects imitation as a hypostatic transcription in time of the eternal righteousness of Christ. He rejects what he considers to be a Neoplatonic ethic in favour of what he considers to be the biblical model of participation in Christ.

We discovered that on some readings **Athanasius** has a positive disposition towards certain Platonic thought categories. This poses a challenge to Torrance's historical theology. His theory that Athanasius rejected and expunged Platonic dualism from his theology is openly contested. There are those who argue, on the contrary, that Athanasius overtly worked towards a synthesis between Plato and the Bible in certain areas. Athanasius's frequent usage of the imitation word "παράδειγμα" also presents something of an anomaly for Torrance. He argues that the word was eschewed by the writer to the Hebrews because of its Platonic overtones. If Athanasius was equally committed to avoiding Platonic thought, how is his frequent deployment of the word in relevant contexts explained? Perhaps these objections are surmountable. At the very least they raise the likelihood that Athanasius is not as uniformly antithetical to the approaches associated with the Latin heresy as Torrance presents him to be. Perhaps most significant is the fact that Athanasius uses μιμητής, cognate words and associated word groups to present imitation as integral and necessary to a full account of participation in Christ. I find no acknowledgement or mention of this in Torrance.

Torrance appeals to **the Greek fathers** as those unaffected by the dualistic mindset of Western theology and the Latin heresy. Western theology produced an under-emphasis on participation and overemphasis on imitation. For Torrance, the Greek fathers stood as a corrective to this tendency. However, this was not what we discovered in a cursory reading of the fathers themselves. **Origen** presents imitation as the means of participation. **Gregory's** imitation is a transformative exercise of Christian agency in the context of participation. For **Cyril**, imitation is an expression of sonship by gracious adoption. Thus what is true of Athanasius is true of other Greek fathers: there is no tension between participation and imitation in the description of human agency. There is no trade-off. Rather, imitation is essential to their exposition of the agency established by participation in Christ. Of course, this is somewhat at odds with Torrance.

We found something similar with **Calvin and Kierkegaard**. The Reformer was strongly *against* the abuse of imitation but equally strongly *for* its proper use. He saw the latter as an entailment of participation. Torrance concedes the influence of Thomas à Kempis on Calvin, but views the Dutchman's classic work on imitation with suspicion. Under the influence of Plato, Kierkegaard

affirms imitation as following after the ideal established by God. When calling for a “teleological suspension of ethics”, Kierkegaard rejects imitation as unthinking assimilation of social mores. Thus Kierkegaard, like Plato (and Calvin), affirms one brand of imitation and rejects another. It seems reasonable to assume that Torrance had Kierkegaard’s rejection of imitation in mind when he adapted Kierkegaard in calling for a “soteriological suspension of ethics”. In thinking about imitation, Torrance drew from Kierkegaard, who drew from Plato; and yet Torrance rejected Plato. Moreover, Kierkegaard argued, against the norms of his culture, that costly grace demands imitation. If Bonhoeffer adopted Kierkegaard’s model of costly grace, as some contend, then Torrance, perhaps unwittingly, was leaning heavily on a model of costly grace that incorporated imitation. Yet we found no mention of imitation in Torrance’s articulation of his model. Once again, we encountered a divergence between Torrance and his sources.

This pattern repeated in our brief study of **Karl Barth**. We found much that unifies Torrance and his mentor. There was, however, also much that led us to discriminate between the two. For Barth, the free being and agency of the divine subject is axiomatic. Because this freedom is specified in Jesus Christ, theology is properly called “the-anthropology”, since theology properly concerns anthropology. Therefore, while Torrance calls for a soteriological suspension of ethics, Barth insists that dogmatics is incurably ethical, and vice versa. He is concerned from the outset to describe a derivative and dependent, though nonetheless entirely real, human agency.

Barth, like Torrance, is vehemently opposed to dualistic thinking. He attributes dualism in Western theology to ontological monism, that is, the notion of “continuity between nature and supernature” (Barth, 1981:13–14). For Barth, the idea has its roots in pagan Greek philosophy. In its modern guise it is an idea that has resulted in ethics as an independent discipline, separate from theology, and in a human agency as separate from the agency of God.

If the problem is ultimately rooted in a false ontology, Barth views the solution in a true ontology. Therefore, human being and agency is good only insofar as God sanctifies it. Moreover, the rubric which dominates the Christian ethic is invocation, or calling on the Father-as-divine-Subject in prayer. This is how Barth establishes the asymmetric and entirely dependent relation between the Divine Subject and the sanctified creature. Nevertheless, he goes on to argue for a real human agency. He does so on the basis of the incarnation, whereby the Word of God, who disrupts human autonomy, is the same Word who by his communicative presence establishes and summons a moral response. Jesus Christ may stand as the foundation of human agency, but he also stands as a summons to the exercise of that gift by the children of God. The children of God are called to realise their ontology in history. They have to live out who God has made them in

Christ. Given the summons of his perfect righteousness, they must respond within the limits of their being and agency in the doing of their own 'little righteousness'.

In Barth's conception, human agency is no less agency for being fully determined by God's agency. It is in fact more real for being so determined. Human agents are responsible, and they will be judged. Barth rejects a Roman Catholic model of imitation, in which grace functions as an infusion extending supernature into nature, thereby paradoxically opening the possibility of independent, innate human merit. However, in the place of actualisation he does call for a copy or a mirror of the divine from within the confines of a fallen yet sanctified human nature. For Barth, participation compels imitation. Divine free-agency establishes human "free"-agency and demands that it be exercised in like manner, that is, for the sake of others.

Contrary to Torrance, who calls for a suspension of ethics and is muted on Christian agency, Barth gives a positive account of both the Christian ethic and Christian agency. While he, like Torrance, is very sparing in his use of imitation language, and rejects certain forms of imitation, he undoubtedly affirms properly qualified forms of imitation. He affirms human agency in the context of divine agency, and imitation in the context of participation.

Next, we discovered the strong agreement between Torrance and **Bonhoeffer** in theological ethics. The points of strong agreement made the points of disagreement all the more conspicuous. Both men were epistemological realists, opposed to abstraction and dualism, who emphasised the integrating power of the incarnation, and drew primarily from patristic and Reformed traditions. Both emphasised the person of Christ in his atoning incarnation as the foundation for ethics. The free, responsible, vicarious and representative agency of Christ transfers by analogy into the free, responsible, vicarious and representative agency of the Christian. Bonhoeffer, like Torrance, strongly affirmed participation as the basis of the Christian ethic and rejected imitation as an attempt at independence. Such is the concord between the two.

However, we found at least two important differences. Firstly, Bonhoeffer presents renewed humanity, rather than divinisation, as the telos of salvation history. Secondly, perhaps it follows naturally that he would therefore be inclined to present a fuller account of real human agency. The latter may be derived, embedded, passive, and penultimate, but for all that it is no less real. Indeed, in his exposition of the goal of conformity, Bonhoeffer draws very near to the idea of imitation. It is an "imitation" dependent on participation.

The brief survey in chapter 3 showed significant divergence between Torrance and his sources. Torrance proved to have a less developed account of human agency and to be far more reluctant

to engage with imitation than were his sources. Indeed, his sources often viewed imitation as necessary to a full account of participation.

#### 5.1.5 Chapter 4: A biblical perspective

Chapter 4 was an attempt to offer a biblical perspective on how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate. I exegeted passages from ten books of the Bible that were chosen because 1) they were important to Torrance and Webster, and/or 2) they featured both participation and imitation, and were therefore well suited to study of the relation between the two.

The study found that participation and imitation are profoundly integrated in parts of the Bible. In broad terms, the relationship can be described as follows: participation requires imitation, and imitation is rooted in participation. Moreover, divine agency and human agency are themselves integrated in this relationship, but such that the appropriate order of being is always retained.

A number of passages bolster this basic conclusion, while also making unique contributions to the nature of participation, imitation or the relation between the two. The passages in **Leviticus and Deuteronomy** were chosen for their recognised importance to Old Testament theology and ethics. In Leviticus we discovered a dynamic relationship between divine and human agency in bringing forth human holiness. Human agency is premised on divine agency. Imitation is premised on participation and serves participation. Humans are to strive for holiness as God, who is holy by nature, sanctifies them by grace. Human agency, and imitation unto holiness, is embedded in divine agency via participation. In Deuteronomy, human agency in imitation is analogical: to walk in God's ways is to imitate him to the extent of our capacity, a capacity preceded and established by divine capacity.

As we transitioned into the New Testament we encountered more of the same dynamic relationship between divine and human agency. In **1 Corinthians** the agency of Paul, his associates, and the Corinthians is punctuated by the agency of Christ. The context for Paul's call to imitation is the agency of Christ in bringing new birth and spiritual union. Imitation is described in terms of long-term habitual action towards conformity with Paul's way of life in Christ. Participation instantiates and then demands the imitation of Paul as he imitates Christ in the cruciform life.

In **Ephesians** we once again read of the deep integration of divine agency and human agency. We saw this in the frequent occurrences of the imperative "to walk", the *γίνεσθε* imperative, the *καθὼς καί* conjunctive construction, and, of course, the language of participation ("in Christ") and imitation. We discovered participation as the basis of imitation, and imitation as the full expression

and ongoing confirmation of participation. Ephesians also enriched our understanding of participation and imitation themselves. For example, by way of contrast with Stoic imperatives, Paul's imperatives deepen our idea of imitation: it is rooted in participation and therefore void of independent moral effort. Participation is the basis of imitation. Christians are called to imitate the love of God in Christ as those who participate in it.

A brief study in **1 and 2 Thessalonians** underscored that imitation was common currency in the church from very early on. Indeed, it was part of the wider culture of discipleship, which Paul redeemed to express a uniquely Christian agency. In accordance with the culture, the apostle's message consisted of a *logos*, but also a corresponding *ethos*, namely, imitation. The differentiating feature of Christian imitation was its location within participation. The call to imitate is issued "In the Lord Jesus Christ", and as such it is issued in union with him and under his sovereign compassion and authority. Participation provides both an indicative security and an imperative force.

**The Petrine corpus** reaffirmed what we had already seen elsewhere, that is, that divine agency in effecting participation initiates and propels human agency in imitation. That said, there were also a number of unique contributions in Peter's letters. Firstly, the focus of imitation is on Christ's willingness to endure suffering for the sake of obedience. A second and related contribution is that imitation implies basic fidelity to the general pattern of Christ's life, rather than obsessive concern with the details of his life. This allows room for the realities of our situation even as we seek to imitate Christ. Third, Peter connects imitation with discipleship, which greatly extends the reach of the imitation concept in the Bible. Fourth, Peter uses the language of providence to explain the dynamic between divine and human agency in participation and imitation. Finally, contra Torrance, Peter connects the doctrine of imitation with both ontological atonement and theosis. In all, the Petrine corpus poses a challenge to Torrance's presentation of participation and imitation.

Like the Petrine corpus, **the letters of John** added weight to the overall body of evidence. They also added their own unique contribution. First, participation and imitation are explicitly integrated to an extent not seen elsewhere. Second, in letters dominated by the theme of participation ("abide"), the call to imitation is so prevalent as to prompt one commentator to speak of a "*kathōs ethic*". Third, 1 John warns of the perils of divorcing imitation from participation in an independent grab at divine likeness that has plagued humanity from the beginning.

In sum, on the evidence of these passages, participation requires imitation, and imitation is rooted in participation. Of course, the summary masks a great deal of textured nuance.

We saw some of that nuance in **the Pastoral letters**. There, we are given perspective on imitation 'from the other side', namely, modelling. Christian leaders are presented as moulding moulds that have already been moulded. Modelling in this sense can occur only in Christ. Participation is the essential pre-condition and primary motivator for modelling and imitation in the Pastorals. The other distinct contribution of these letters is the nature and scope of imitation. Imitation is the personal interaction whereby one life is impressed into another by the determined efforts of both the modeller and the model. Imitation spans all of the Christian life. Indeed, a properly qualified imitation even functions in the domain of salvation, but only with divine being and agency as a prior condition (cf. Phil. 2.12 and Deut. 10.6). In the physical absence of Christ and his apostles, Scripture norms our imitation.

**Galatians** was also selected for its importance to Torrance. He argues that it presents the relation between the agency of Christ and the agency of the Christian as one of participation, though the exact nature of the relation is a mystery. By participation in Christ, his human response becomes ours, and ours his. As such, all of grace does not mean nothing of man. However, Torrance's treatment of genitive phrases and his silence on imitation as a major theme in the letter leaves his exegesis open to question. Moreover, even scholars who adopt the same exegetical positions do not arrive at his particular theological and ethical formulations. That is, they still have room for a positive account of Christian agency. Indeed, the exegetical and theological evidence suggests that precisely because all of grace is all of man, imitation is necessary to a full-blown account of participation.

Like Galatians, **Philippians 2** was chosen not only for its relevance to the themes at hand, but primarily for its importance to Torrance's representative critic, Webster. Balanced weighing of the grammatical evidence relating to verse 5 suggested that forcing a decision between participation and imitation is to fall into the fallacy of the excluded middle. Rather, the evidence points to a dynamic relation between participation and imitation. We found this relation in the rest of the letter, where human agency is defined as an active yet utterly dependent submission to the ruling presence of divine being and agency. In a book full of exemplars, the way to participate in Christ is to imitate him. Christ is presented as more than the supreme example, but he is no less than that. The exegesis of Philippians 2 endorsed Webster's basic conclusions: the letter calls for the imitation of Christ; imitation is rooted in participation; imitation prevents divine and human agency from eliding into an identity. However, while Webster's theological instincts are compelling, they appear insufficiently grounded in the text of Philippians. The hope is that this study has added evidentiary weight and descriptive depth to Webster's account of agency in participation and imitation.

I repeat what I wrote in the conclusion to chapter 4. In the Bible, participation and imitation are often profoundly integrated. Each is indispensable to a full and faithful account of the other. If Torrance wishes to make the strongest biblical case he can for a participationist ethic, his case must include imitation. Where participation is the ground, the basis, the constitution, the hope, the means, the cause, the context, the motivation, and so on, of the Christian life, imitation is the outworking, the evidence, the effect, the demand, the manner, the mandate, the pattern, the expression, and so on. The implication is that human being and agency are real, but are nonetheless embedded in, subsisting on, deriving from, and utterly dependent on divine being and agency. This is a significant departure from Torrance's model, which stresses participation and, at best, downplays imitation.

This summary and review of chapters 2, 3 and 4 (Torrance, his sources and the Bible) brings us to the point of conclusion.

## **5.2 Conclusion and further reflection**

### **5.2.1 Conclusion**

I repeat the central theoretical argument of this study here, for the sake of convenience:

... the Bible and, in part, the sources to which Torrance appeals hold agency in participation and in imitation in close relation, which is a significant advance on Torrance's almost exclusive focus on the agency of Christ in participation.

Moreover, the stated aim of this study is "to arrive at a biblical perspective of how agency in participation and in imitation function and relate, in conversation with Thomas Torrance and his interlocutors."

On the basis of the analysis of Torrance, his sources, and the biblical evidence presented above, I believe the central theoretical argument has been conclusively made, and the aim of this study achieved. By the standard of some of his own sources and the authority of the Bible, without imitation, Torrance's model of participation as a Christian response is truncated. The criticism that judges a scholar by what he does not say is perhaps the most unfair type of criticism. And yet, the chief criticism of this study is not that Torrance dealt with participation and should also have dealt with imitation. The criticism is that, by the standard of the Bible and some of his own sources, to deal with participation adequately, Torrance had to deal with imitation. A full account of participation must include imitation. At best, Torrance downplays imitation. It can be reasonably argued that he goes further and deliberately avoids imitation, or is even hostile to the doctrine. On the contrary, in some of Torrance's own sources, and in the biblical survey above, participation

in Christ and imitation of Christ are deeply integrated. Divine agency and human agency are, likewise, deeply integrated (though set in their proper order and without confusion). Thus, the somewhat ironic conclusion of this study is that, on the witness of some of his own sources and Scripture, it appears Torrance has not attended closely enough to the true nature of participation in Christ.

In fairness, Torrance says more about Christian agency than he does about imitation, though, once again, by the standards of some of his sources, even his treatment of Christian agency is muted. Moreover, imitation is integral to the biblical exposition of how Christ's agency relates to that of the Christian. Imitation is an important part of the story. Where Torrance would relegate the whole story to mystery, imitation gives us a passing glimpse inside the mystery. Imitation is part of what prevents Christian being and agency from dissolving into the being and agency of Christ himself. It allows for distinction without separation. It allows for distinct Christian agency while maintaining full dependence on Christ. Imitation is a relentless objectivity which vivifies and governs Christian subjectivity. It is one means by which Christ serves us and rules us.

In short, Torrance appears to be right in much of what he affirms, but wrong in some of what he denies, or simply ignores. On the other hand, Webster, his critic, appears to be vindicated in the area of imitation, though the evidentiary basis for his claims is perhaps questionable. My hope is that this study represents an advance on both positions.

In light of this conclusion, we turn now to further reflection.

## **5.2.2 Further reflection**

### **5.2.2.1 Providence and the Holy Spirit**

Throughout the survey of Torrance's sources and the Scriptures, we repeatedly encountered the language and themes of the doctrine of divine providence.<sup>92</sup> This is not surprising when one considers that the doctrine of providence is an important locus for the study of the relationship between God and his creation, and between divine and human agency. Indeed, the underlying difficulty in the formulation of the relationship between participation and imitation is in properly defining the relationship between divine agency and human agency. Hence, the Reformed doctrine of providence presents itself as an indispensable resource for those labouring to formulate the nature of the relationship between participation in Christ and imitation of Christ.

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<sup>92</sup> The writings of Chrysostom and Athanasius are early examples.

This is not the place for a full exposition of the Reformed doctrine of providence, but hopefully a few passing comments will suffice to demonstrate its salience.<sup>93</sup> It is interesting to note how many of Torrance's primary concerns are addressed by this doctrine.

The Reformed doctrine of providence is concerned with the relation of God to his creation. The scope of the doctrine includes the internal act of God in plan and foreknowledge, and the external act of God in preservation, government and concurrence (Bavinck, 2004:597). In the relation of God to his creation, the external act of God is the primary focus. Bavinck (2004:605) summarises the providence of God in preservation, government and concurrence in this way:

Whatever God may do in nature and grace, it is always he who preserves all things, who empowers them by the influx of his energy, and who governs them by his wisdom and omnipotence.

In preservation, God upholds all creaturely existence. Preservation is the continuous and creative act of "causing creatures to persist in their existence" (Bavinck, 2004:607). Preservation is the description of the relation between God who creates something other than himself, and that which then exists in complete dependence on himself. Indeed, (Bavinck, 2004:608):

The Christian... confesses that the world and every creature in it have received their own existence, but increase in reality, freedom and authenticity to the extent that they are more dependent on God and exist from moment to moment from, through and to God.

In other words, creation has its own existence, but it is an utterly and continuously dependent existence. Moreover, the fullest realisation of creaturely existence is found in the expression of dependence. If we apply preservation to the subject at hand, human agency has its own existence, an existence that is best expressed in total dependence.

Government is the direction of all things towards the goal which God has decreed. Government expresses the sovereignty of God in moving all things to their proper end. It is the teleological aspect of providence. God is driving all things towards the consummation of his kingdom and the glory of his name (Bavinck, 2004:618). While the Reformed doctrine makes no mention of theosis in the way Torrance does, it does stress perfect communion between God and his people in glory as the final destination (Bavinck, 2008:715).

Concurrence is the presence of God in preservation and government, upholding and ruling rather than annihilating creaturely existence. In providence, God works through means and according

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<sup>93</sup> I have written extensively on this topic elsewhere (Frost, 2014:67–82), and these comments draw primarily on that work.

to their nature (Bavinck, 2004:611).<sup>94</sup> God causes secondary causes. He is immediately present in causing secondary causes; those causes mediate his presence to their effects.<sup>95</sup> Bavinck (2004:614–615; emphasis mine)<sup>96</sup> describes concurrence in this way:

With his almighty power God makes possible every secondary cause and is present in it with his being at its beginning, progression, and end...

In relation to God the secondary causes can be compared to instruments... In relation to their effects and products they are causes in the true sense. And precisely because... the primary works through the secondary, the effect that proceeds from the two is one and the product is one. *There is no division of labor between God and his creature, but the same effect is totally the effect of the primary cause as well as totally the effect of the proximate cause.* The product is also in the same sense totally the product of the primary cause as well as totally the product of the secondary cause.

We could easily substitute the word “agency” for “cause” to illumine our thinking about the relation between Christ and the Christian. The Reformed doctrine of providence has a plausible articulation of how “all of grace” can simultaneously be “all of man”, to paraphrase Torrance. Participation in Christ need not preclude imitation of Christ. Imitation of Christ does not necessarily imply independent agency.

Calvin (2005:182) had a similar understanding of providence whereby God works “by means, without means and against means”. And yet he also asserts that the means are real and distinct from God, and where the means have agency, that agency is real and distinct (e.g., Calvin, 2005:188–189). In the relation of God to his creation, Calvin envisaged multiple levels of agency differentiated by a hierarchy of essence. At each level, agency is defined by the ontology of the agent, and therefore by a diversity of motive and purpose. He illustrates the principle using the plunder of Job. In that story, the robbers were doing the bidding of Satan, and yet retained both agency and responsibility, since they were motivated by greed and their purpose was to rob Job. Satan was doing the bidding of God, and yet he retained both agency and responsibility, since he was motivated by hatred and his purpose was to prove Job unfaithful. God, though he is the ultimate agent, remains guilt-free, since he is motivated by the ultimate desire to bless Job and deepen his trust (Helm, 2004:112–113, 124). Thus, Calvin treats the relation between divine and human agency by defining an essential hierarchy of differentiated being, purpose and motive.<sup>97</sup> In

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<sup>94</sup> Evidently, the Reformed doctrine of providence applies the *κατὰ φύσιν* principle that is so central to Torrance.

<sup>95</sup> Calvin (2005:176) argues for the pervasive, personal, immediate, perpetual and teleological involvement of God in his creation, in what he terms “special providence”.

<sup>96</sup> Bavinck (2004:614) uses Phil. 2.13 in his exposition of concurrence. Compare with 4.2.6 above.

<sup>97</sup> As explored above, Barth and Webster follow a similar line.

other words, he, like Torrance, excludes ontological monism. By asserting a hierarchy of differentiated ontology, Calvin can also assert a real and distinct yet fully dependent hierarchy of agency, which preserves both dependence and responsibility.

We find something similar playing out in the competing doctrines which Bavinck is trying to avoid (cf. Calvin, 2005:173). On the one hand is pantheism, which collapses God into his creation. On the other is deism, which proposes some sort of ontological continuity between Creator and creation, but nevertheless splits the two with some strictness.<sup>98</sup> In deism, after imbuing the world with some initial energy, God retreats from any active involvement. Deism is a denial of providence. Deism grants secondary causes full independence. Bavinck (2004:601; emphasis mine) describes one brand of deism in this way:

[It] so *abstractly and dualistically* opposed the infinite to the finite that God could not even create the world out of nothing but only from *an eternally existing finite substance*. In accordance with this view it also withdrew a large area of the world from God's providence, leaving it to the *independent* insight and judgment of mankind. By nature the human will is so free that God cannot even beforehand calculate what a person will do in a given case. Only when a decision has been made does God adapt his own action to it. *Free causes*, accordingly, function in *complete independence* alongside and outside of God. The relation between God and the world is like that between a mechanical engineer and a machine. After making it and starting it, he leaves it to its own devices and only intervenes if something has to be repaired.

When we read this, we cannot help hear Torrance's protest against Platonic dualism. Abstraction, the eternity of matter (ontological monism), independent free agency – these are all words and concepts in a Platonic worldview that Torrance so vehemently rejected. They are precisely the same words and concepts rejected by a Reformed doctrine of providence.

Finally, it is worth noting that in the Reformed doctrine of providence, the Holy Spirit is the immanent presence and agency of God upholding and directing human agency (Bavinck, 2004:277–279, 605–606). On the other hand, Torrance is consistently criticised for an underdeveloped doctrine of the Spirit in his thinking about human agency (e.g., Habets, 2009:140, 145, 191, 195, 196; Macleod, 2000:131–134). It appears that he would have been well served in this area by the Reformed doctrine of providence.

All of this is to say that the theological and conceptual equipment for dealing with the relation between divine and human agency, and therefore also between participation and imitation, is

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<sup>98</sup> Bavinck's struggle mirrors that of Athanasius, who, according to Torrance, was warding off Platonic ultra-transcendence (read deism) on the one hand, and Aristotelean ultra-immanence (read pantheism) on the other.

available in the Reformed doctrine of providence. It seems it would have been fruitful for Torrance to explore the question of the Christian response along these lines. The same applies to those of us who follow after him.

### **5.2.2.2 The abiding relevance of the participation–imitation relation to Christian ethics**

Jordan Peterson is a Canadian clinical psychologist whose latest book, *12 Rules for Life*, has been a number one bestseller on Amazon (Dundas, 2018), and whose YouTube videos have attracted in the region of forty million views (Brooks, 2018). In an opinion piece, David Brooks (2018) of the *New York Times* concedes that Peterson may well be “the most important influential public intellectual in the Western world right now”.

The general relevance of Peterson, for our purposes, is just how much of his work is devoted to biblical exegesis. His doctrine of Scripture is hardly orthodox, though there are points of connection (Roberts, 2018). In Peterson’s own words (quoted in Roberts, 2018):

The Bible is, for better or worse, the foundational document of Western civilization (of Western values, Western morality, and Western conceptions of good and evil). It’s the product of processes that remain fundamentally beyond our comprehension. The Bible is a library composed of many books, each written and edited by many people. It’s a truly emergent document—a selected, sequenced and finally coherent story written by no one and everyone over many thousands of years. The Bible has been thrown up, out of the deep, by the collective human imagination, which is itself a product of unimaginable forces operating over unfathomable spans of time. Its careful, respectful study can reveal things to us about what we believe and how we do and should act that can be discovered in almost no other manner.

The special relevance of Peterson to this study emerges from the ethical nature of his work, suggested by the title of his bestselling book, *12 Rules for Life*. Roberts (2018; emphasis mine) captures the heart of the matter:

Christ, in Peterson’s conception, is the ‘archetypal perfect man.’ He is the historical figure who approaches so close to the archetype that he is identified with it. Those who are paying attention shouldn’t be surprised to see that Peterson focuses upon Christ primarily as *example to imitate*, rather than as the Saviour to trust...<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Peterson (2018) acknowledges his debt to Eastern Orthodox Christianity, with its emphasis on Christian agency in following after and imitating Christ. This is at odds with Torrance’s reading of the Greek fathers, and it concurs with the survey of the Greek fathers in 3.3 above.

Roberts (2018; emphasis mine) goes on to argue that, despite its obvious flaws, Peterson's account nevertheless has much to offer orthodox Christians:

Peterson, for his part, exposes some of the weaknesses in many Christian accounts of grace, accounts which so emphasize Christ's work on our behalf and the sinfulness and insufficiency of our works that they fail to speak effectively to our restoration in God's image, *the importance of following Christ's example*, and *the establishment of our agency in him*.

Jordan Peterson, an enormously influential public intellectual, is advocating the imitation of Christ as essential to a human ethic in 2018. The inference I draw is simply this: the imitation of Christ remains highly relevant today. That Peterson partially misunderstands imitation, and that he has abstracted imitation from participation in Christ, with very dangerous implications – these serve only to underscore the point. The participation–imitation relationship is of abiding, paramount, and urgent relevance. Further and ongoing study of this relationship is undoubtedly necessary. Notwithstanding the shortfalls outlined above, the writings of Thomas Torrance will surely prove indispensable to that endeavour.

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