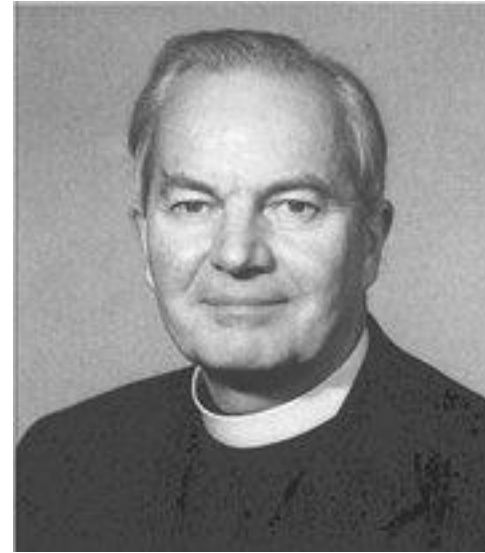


The Perichoretic Mission of God

A Missiology Based on the Trinitarian Christology and Soteriology of
Thomas F. Torrance

Abstract



- ▶ Torrance's Trinitarian Christology and Soteriology
 - ▶ Christ assumed fallen flesh as God incarnate
 - ▶ His life, death, resurrection, and ascension sanctifies humanity to God through a relationally ontological atonement
 - ▶ This means humanity is now able to participate in God's mission ontologically and relationally as well
- ▶ Purpose of this study:
 - ▶ Formulate a missiology based on these ideas found within Torrance's theology

Research Concern



- ▶ Why this topic?
 - ▶ Often American evangelicalism's understanding of Christ's atonement can be oversimplified
 - ▶ Not necessarily incorrectly, but with nuances that can be damaging to the way Church participates in Christ's mission
 - ▶ Christ's atonement is much more than an impersonal salvific transaction that cleanses us of our sins so we can go to heaven.
 - ▶ When we understand Christ's atonement as a deeply relational and ontological reality, it inevitably affects how the Church should engage in mission

Key Terms and Definitions

- ▶ Christology- theology relating to the person and work of Jesus Christ
- ▶ Soteriology- theology relating to how man is saved through Christ
- ▶ Incarnation- the doctrine that God came to the world in the form of the person of Jesus Christ, who was both fully God and also fully human.
- ▶ Sanctification- the act of God making something or someone holy by setting them apart
- ▶ Ontological- relating to the very nature of existence or being

Key Terms and Definitions (cont.)

- ▶ Perichoresis- term describing the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the Trinity, specifically referring to their interpenetration of one another
- ▶ Missiology- the study of the mission of God
- ▶ Atonement- the reconciliation of humanity to God through the person and work of Christ Jesus
- ▶ *Missio Dei*- a Latin phrase referring to the mission of God
- ▶ Hypostatic Union- the combination of divine and human natures within the person of Jesus Christ

Research Questions



- ▶ What are the missiological implications of Torrance's Christological soteriology for the Church today?
- ▶ Can Torrance's understanding of humanity participating in the Triune Communion of God through perichoresis serve as the basis for a more holistic understanding of how the Church engages in God's mission? If so, how might perichoretic participation in the mission of God look like?
- ▶ Does Torrance's understanding of Christ's person and work create any corresponding missional implications for Communion? If so, what might that mean for the Church participating in the *missio Dei*?

Missiology?

- ▶ “The critical reflection on the task of mission.”
 - ▶ “As people come to Christ over the generations, missiology seeks to understand ‘the ways in which Christian faith becomes attached to different contexts.’” -Tom Steffen and Lois McKinney in *Encountering Missionary Life and Work*
 - ▶ “All that God wishes to accomplish in the world so that he is glorified and God’s Kingdom expands universally and comprehensively... as unfolded and detailed from Genesis to Revelation.” -Tom Steffen and Lois McKinney in *Encountering Missionary Life and Work*
- ▶ Missiology depends on Christology



Christology

- ▶ According to Torrance, Christ is not a metaphor, but a historical event
- ▶ Therefore, Christ must be understood within historical context



Old Testament Background



- ▶ Creation narrative and the Fall of Mankind into sin
- ▶ Cain and Abel
 - ▶ God rejected Cain's offering because he offered his own good works
 - ▶ God accepted Abel's offering because it was already provided by God
- ▶ Israel becomes God's "instrument of salvation"
 - ▶ But Israel cannot stop rejecting God no matter how much he pursues them
- ▶ "The rejection of Israel as a people is only to be understood in the light of the substitutionary nature of the cross, for Israel's rejection is bound up by God with the atoning rejection of the man on the cross, or rather in his acceptance of the sentence of our rejection- *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*"- Torrance, *Incarnation*

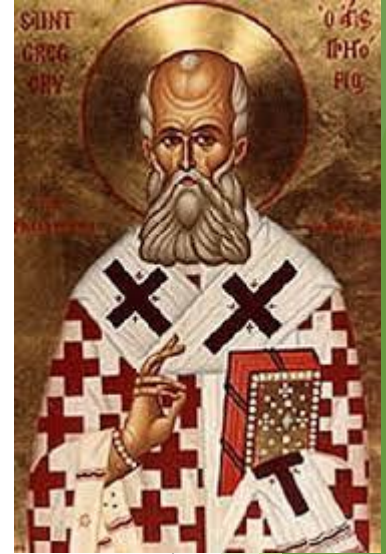
What is the Incarnation?



- ▶ “The Word became flesh”- John 1:14
- ▶ *Logos* and *Dabar*
 - ▶ “He was so truly man in the midst of mankind that it was not easy to recognize him as other than man or to distinguish him from other men. He came to his own and his own received him not. He became a particular man, Jesus, who stands among other men unsurpassed and unrecognized. That is the way he became flesh, by becoming one particular man. And yet this is the creator of all mankind, now himself become a man.”
- ▶ But how can God become both divine and human simultaneously?

“The Unassumed is the Unredeemed”

- ▶ Torrance and Gregory Nazianzen
- ▶ Christ’s atonement did not begin with his death on the cross, but rather it began at the virgin birth
 - ▶ “Although he assumed our fallen humanity when he became flesh, in assuming it he sanctified it in himself, and all through his earthly life, he overcame our sin through his righteousness, our impurity through his purity, condemning sin in our flesh by the sheer holiness of his life within it.”- Thomas F. Torrance



Christ's Active and Passive Obedience

- ▶ John Calvin
 - ▶ Active Obedience- Christ's embodiment of what it means to have a perfect relationship with the Father
 - ▶ Passive Obedience- Christ's willingness to accept judgment from the Father on our behalf
- ▶ These illustrate how God went about sanctifying humanity to himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ



Evidence for Christ's Sanctification

- ▶ Luke 2:42- Jesus “grew in wisdom and stature both toward God and toward man.”
 - ▶ Physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual growth
- ▶ *Bar Mitzvah*
- ▶ *Ben Bayith*
- ▶ The Incarnation was not a static event, but the whole life, death, and resurrection of a specific person!



The Hypostatic Union as Reconciliation



- ▶ The Hypostatic Union in itself is reconciliation
- ▶ This is what makes Christ's atonement ontological
- ▶ Christ was not the perfect sacrifice as a neutral third party, but he was the perfect sacrifice because he was God himself, dying on the cross and resurrecting to life
- ▶ Through Christ, God identified with humanity's brokenness to completion, even to death!

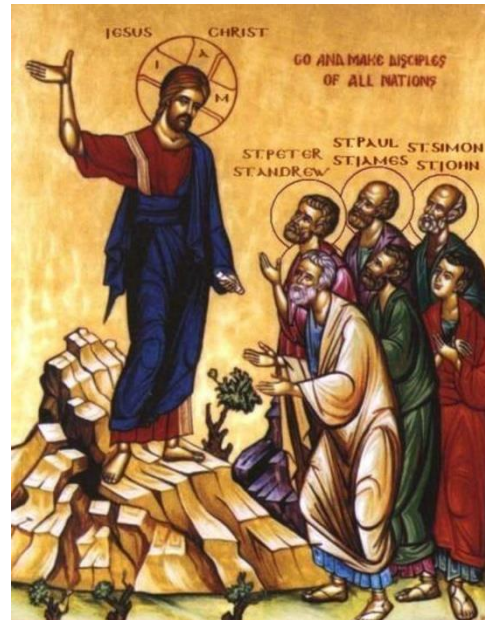
Wondrous Exchange and Perichoresis

- ▶ Through Christ, God became so united with humanity that humanity now participates in the being and act of God.
 - ▶ What John Calvin calls a “wondrous exchange”
- ▶ Perichoresis
 - ▶ Each person of the Trinity constantly submits to one another in love
 - ▶ God is the embodiment of perfect love and holiness
 - ▶ Because of Christ’s atonement, humanity ontologically participates in the Triune life of God
 - ▶ This means we participate in God’s mission of reconciliation as revealed in Christ



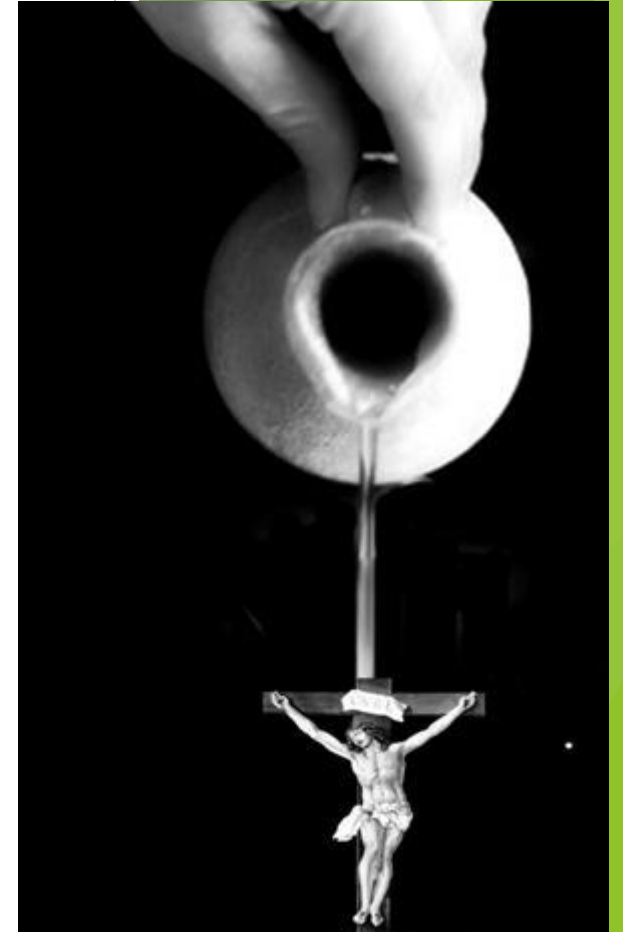
Missional Implications

- ▶ Christocentrism
 - ▶ The mission of God is not to glorify the Church, but to glorify Christ
 - ▶ Obeying the Great Commission
 - ▶ Our participation in mission should be a direct reflection of Christ's life, death, and resurrection



Missional Implications (cont.)

- ▶ Embodiment of the Incarnation
 - ▶ Humility of Christ in Philippians 2
 - ▶ The principle of the Incarnation was to identify with the brokenness of creation
 - ▶ When the Church does not identify with the world's brokenness as Christ did, it becomes something less than the Body of Christ



Missional Implications (cont.)



- ▶ Holistic nature of the Hypostatic Union
 - ▶ Christ was the complete integration of the divine and human natures
 - ▶ The Church cannot afford to compartmentalize the nature of Jesus Christ
 - ▶ Therefore, the Church cannot and should not prioritize spiritual ministry over physical ministry
 - ▶ The very nature of Christ disagrees with such a dichotomy
 - ▶ Compassionate ministries that address spiritual needs are not simply a gateway for greater spiritual goals, but rather they are at the core of God's merciful being and act. In themselves, they are an ontological, spiritual reality

Missional Implications (cont.)



▶ Mission as Communion

- ▶ When the Church partakes in Communion, we claim Christ's sufferings as our sufferings, his mission as our mission
- ▶ Communion is not an empty ritual in which the Church remembers its crucified Lord that it may be forever guilty and shameful
- ▶ Communion in itself is missional because it beckons Christ's people to become sent as he was sent
- ▶ Communion is not about coming to the Lord's table, it is about sending the Lord's table out into the world

Conclusions

- ▶ The Church needs to identify with the world as Christ identified with the world
 - ▶ Not to participate in sin, but to proclaim redemption!
 - ▶ When this happens, our Communion with God comes alive!
- ▶ If the Church stays inside its walls, it fails to witness to the testimony of the Gospel
- ▶ But if the Church surrenders to God, abandoning its own mission in favor of his, Christ becomes living and active because that Church is now his body!
- ▶ That is how redemption has become available for all creation!