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“Tha mi a’ toirt fainear dur gearan”¹

J. McLeod Campbell and P. T. Forsyth on the Extent of
Christ’s Vicarious Ministry

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THE NOTION THAT IN the gracious act of election God enters into the very conflict that has erupted between God’s own covenant faithfulness and the unfaithfulness of humanity as God’s covenant partner (and there in full solidarity with humanity—standing with and among sinners—has borne human infidelity and recalcitrance to its deathly end in order to heal and restore humanity to participation through the *koinonia* of the Spirit in the eternal and triune life and love) lies at the very heart of the recovery of that stream of Reformed thought identified as “Evangelical Calvinism,” and which has been most clearly articulated in recent decades in the work of T. F. and J. B. Torrance. With seemingly tireless energy, these two brothers (and many of their students) maintained the view that a bifurcation of streams emerged early on in Reformed thought, one which ran from John Calvin through John Knox, James Fraser of Brae, Robert Leighton, and the Marrow men, and found fresh articulation in the nineteenth century in a parish minister of the Kirk in Row on the Gareloch in Dunbartonshire; namely, John McLeod Campbell. This stream, in Torrance parlance, represents “Evangelical Calvinism.” The other stream, associated with names such as Theodore Beza, William Perkins, John Owen, Thomas Watson, George and Patrick

1. Gaelic: “I note your objection.”

Gillespie, and Samuel Rutherford, among others, represents, in Torrance parlance, “Federal Calvinism.”

At the heart of so-called “Evangelical Calvinism” lies belief in the vicarious nature of Jesus Christ’s ministry, i.e., that “Christ was anointed by the Spirit in our humanity to fulfil his ministry for us,” or “on our behalf.”² Among those who wish to highlight the ministry secured in and by Christ’s vicarious humanity, however, there remains some debate over the extent to which Jesus’ work “on our behalf” reaches, and the implications of such for human participation in that work by the Spirit. This essay shall attend to this debate, and will do so by bringing John McLeod Campbell into conversation with a compatriot of his—albeit of a later generation—the Aberdeenshire-born Congregationalist minister, Peter Taylor Forsyth.

JOHN MCLEOD CAMPBELL (1800–1872) ON CHRIST’S VICARIOUS CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE

John McLeod Campbell’s 1856 *magnum opus*, *The Nature of the Atonement*, is fundamentally an exploration of a notion introduced, but not followed up, by Jonathan Edwards. In his miscellaneous remarks on *Satisfaction for Sin*, Edwards, a theologian who writes “with the profundity and inventive élan that belong to only the very greatest thinkers,”³ notes,

[It] is requisite that God should punish all sin with infinite punishment; because all sin, as it is against God, is infinitely heinous, and has infinite demerit, is justly infinitely hateful to him, and so stirs up infinite abhorrence and indignation in him. Therefore, by what was before granted, it is requisite that God should punish it, *unless there be something in some measure to balance this desert; either some answerable repentance and sorrow for it, or some other compensation.*⁴

Campbell departs from the bulk of the tradition (and Edwards) and follows Edwards’ second possibility (what Oliver Crisp coins “Edwardsian non-penal substitution”⁵) of an “answerable repentance

2. J. B. Torrance, “The Vicarious Humanity of Christ,” 145.

3. Jenson, *America’s Theologian*, 3.

4. Edwards, *Works*, 565. Italics mine.

5. Crisp, “Non-Penal Substitution,” 415–33.

and sorrow," rather than punishment, in the atonement.⁶ Theoretically, Edwards suggests, this equivalent sorrow and repentance would equally satisfy the demands of justice. Campbell transforms what for Edwards is hypothetical into the very voice of the gospel itself: "There would be more atoning worth," he writes, "in one tear of true and perfect sorrow which the memory of the past would awaken . . . than in endless ages of penal woe."⁷ A. B. Bruce summarizes Campbell's position: "It is not necessary, in order to pardon, that the penalty of sin be endured, adequate confession of sin being an alternative method of satisfying the claims of divine holiness."⁸

While Western orthodoxy has mostly stressed the Godward side of the atonement, Campbell laid the weight on the creaturely side, following Anselm: "None therefore but God can make this reparation . . . Yet, none should make it save a man, otherwise man does not make amends."⁹ Campbell recognized that an adequate repentance by those disabled by sin, while required, was morally impossible, and therefore if such were to be offered it would have to be by God, albeit from our side—that is, by God in fallen flesh.¹⁰ This is because, Campbell argued, genuine repentance involves seeing the sin (and sinners) "with God's eyes,"¹¹ viewing broken humanity from within, feeling the deep sorrow

6. The notion was anticipated in the work of Westminster theologian Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661). See T. F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 100, 305. It seems that Robert Paul's assessment was right: "By the middle of the nineteenth century the time was ripe for a complete revision of the doctrine [of atonement]" (Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments*, 140).

7. Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, 124. Contrary to Stott's assessment, Campbell does not reject penal substitution, or all forensic elements in the atonement. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 142. While he recognises the reality of legal elements at work in the atonement, Campbell is critical of "penal sufferings," especially in those crude articulations which suggest that the Father was in any way punishing the Son. Such notions, he believes, distort the doctrine of God and drive a wedge between the unity of the Father and the Son in the atonement. See Thimell, "Christ in Our Place," 197–8; T. F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 308–9. This debate finds fresh, and even less satisfactory, expression in Sölle's critique of Moltmann's doctrine of God. See Sölle, "Gott und das Leiden," 111–17.

8. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ*, 351.

9. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo?* 66–67. Hart convincingly argues that the long-thought divergence between Anselm and Campbell is unjustified. Hart, "Anselm," 311–33.

10. Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*, 120.

11. *Ibid.*, 107. Hart suggests that things which may seem trivial to us might be an unbearable burden and pain to one who has eyes to see and ears to hear. Hart, "Anselm," 329.

that sin creates and confessing the righteousness of God's judgment upon it. As R. C. Moberly recalls, sin "has blunted the self's capacity for entire hatred of sin, and has blunted it once for all."¹² Only one, therefore, who could see things *as they really are* could make an adequate confession both of God's righteousness and of human sin. Such confession is not made in order to avoid sin's consequences but precisely that sin's consequences may be embraced in all their dreadfulness, "meeting the cry of these sins for judgment, and the wrath due to them, absorbing and exhausting that divine wrath in that adequate confession and perfect response on the part of man."¹³

Genuine repentance and confession for "the sin of His brethren" would have to come from one who, as it were, stood on God's side in the human dock.¹⁴ What was impossible for sinners was possible for this man who in the fullness of the hypostatic union penetrated into the depths of our humanity to see sin as God sees it, and to condemn sin as God condemns it, and yet do so from our side and as our head. That is, in "the High Priest of redeemed humanity"¹⁵ such confession and condemnation of sin happened not only with "great sorrow" but *from the side of sin*. So Campbell: "This confession as to its nature, must have been a *perfect Amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the side of man*. Such an Amen was due in the truth of things. He who was the Truth could not be in humanity and not utter it—and it was necessarily a first step in dealing with the Father on our behalf. He who would intercede for us must begin with confessing our sins."¹⁶

Christ's "perfect Amen in humanity to the judgment of God" has value *for humanity* insofar as Christ, "spiritually speaking . . . is the hu-

12. Moberly, *Atonement*, 42. See Moberly, *Atonement*, 26–47; Tuttle, *So Rich a Soil*, 105–7.

13. Campbell, *Atonement*, 124. See also Campbell, *Sermons and Lectures* vol. 1, 70.

14. Campbell, *Atonement*, 118; cf. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, 213.

15. Campbell, *Fragments of Truth*, 15:176; cf. Redding, *Prayer*, 197–98; J. B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 47–48.

16. Campbell, *Atonement*, 118. Inherent in this confession was the confession of God's holiness; Christ's suffering forming a "condition and form of holiness and love under the pressure of our sin and its consequent misery." Ibid., 107; cf. Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement*, 172–73; Forsyth, *Work*, 150, 189; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 258–59; Macquarrie, "John McLeod Campbell 1800–72," 266; Goroncy, "The Elusiveness, Loss, and Cruciality of Recovered Holiness," 195–209; Goroncy, "The Final Sanity is Complete Sanctity," 249–79.

man race, made sin for the race, and acting for it in a way so inclusively total, that all mortal confessions, repentances, sorrows, are fitly acted by him in our behalf. His divine Sonship in our humanity is charged in the offering thus to God of all which the guilty world itself should offer,” as Horace Bushnell notes.¹⁷ In offering that perfect response from the depths of humanity Christ “absorbs” the full realization of God’s judgment against sin. Standing as God, Christ knows “a perfect sorrow” regarding sin. And, standing with no “personal consciousness of sin” but fully clad in fallen flesh,¹⁸ Christ is able to offer “a perfect repentance” that is required from humanity’s side offering that perfect “Amen” to God’s mind concerning sin.¹⁹ With this response—even in the midst of Calvary’s darkness—God re-speaks those words first heard over Jordan’s waters: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17).²⁰ And in response, humanity cries out “Our Father, hallowed be thy name” (Matt 6:9).²¹

But to conclude at this point is to misrepresent Campbell’s position. His notion of Christ’s representative repentance must also be conceived as that to be exercised with the full weight of the prospective goal of Christ’s atonement—that those for whom Christ died might be enabled by the Spirit to participate in the confession and repentance of their elder brother, his repentance being “reproduced” in them.²²

17. Bushnell, *Forgiveness and Law*, 30. Bushnell proceeds to criticise Campbell’s view.

18. Campbell, *Atonement*, 118; cf. Stevenson, *God in Our Nature*, 153–91; Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh*, 17–18; Schaff, ed., *Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus*, 44: “For He took upon Him the flesh in which we have sinned that by wearing our flesh He might forgive sins; a flesh which He shares with us by wearing it, not by sinning in it” (St. Hilary).

19. Campbell, *Atonement*, 118; cf. Van Dyk, *The Desire of Divine Love*, 55. It seems that Campbell may have gleaned this notion from his two close friends, Edward Irving and Thomas Erskine. The idea also finds some voice in Gregory of Nazianzus, John Calvin, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Thomas Weinandy. See Erskine, *The Brazen Serpent*, 38; Hanna, ed., *Letters of Thomas Erskine*, 547–48; Irving, *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, vol. 5; Horrocks, *Laws of the Spiritual Order*, 187–92; Stevenson, *Campbell*, 187–89; Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 212.

20. See Tuttle, *Campbell*, 93–96.

21. See T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 79; T. F. Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 143. I have argued elsewhere that such hallowing is a key motif for understanding Forsyth’s entire corpus. See Goroncy, *Hallowed Be Thy Name*.

22. Campbell, *Atonement*, 142. See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1, 3.1.4. In Campbell’s defense, retorts that suggest Campbell replaces a legal fiction with a moral one do

Motivated in no small part by what Campbell observes as the fruits of a high Calvinist commitment to the doctrine of limited atonement, of a doctrine of God in which justice (for all) is necessary while love and mercy (for the elect alone) are “arbitrary,”²³ and its attendant undermining of assurance,²⁴ Campbell was in no doubt that the notion of Christ’s vicarious confession and repentance provided a more satisfactory witness to the divine atonement than did merely juridical views. Identified with a preaching tradition that conserved the priority of law before gospel, and made repentance logically prior to forgiveness, “deep in [the high Calvinist’s] thinking was a doctrine of conditional grace.”²⁵

P. T. FORSYTH’S (1848–1921) APPRECIATION OF CAMPBELL

Before proceeding to identify and discuss Forsyth’s “one criticism” of Campbell, it behooves us to pause and highlight five areas where Forsyth is deeply indebted to Campbell, whom Alfred Cave named “That chaste, patient, and loving Spirit.”²⁶

1. Like Campbell, Forsyth rejects any logic or speculation about the atonement that would imply any wedge between the persons of the Trinity.
2. There is no sense in the atonement that God is punishing Jesus.
3. God’s love is neither subservient to, nor dependent on, nor divorced from, God’s righteousness (justice). Both provide the ground for human assurance, and both find clearest expression in the atonement where God acts lovingly to put things right. The atonement, therefore, does not change God’s disposition towards humanity but rather reveals it and secures it in history.²⁷

little justice to the subtlety of Campbell’s thought. See Taylor, “The Best Books on the Atonement,” 267; cf. Van Dyk, *Desire*, 113.

23. Campbell, *Atonement*, 73–76.

24. See Campbell, *Reminiscences and Reflections*, 24, 132.

25. J. B. Torrance, “Introduction,” 3.

26. Cave, *The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 350. Forsyth’s relationship to Campbell is a vexed one. While Forsyth’s close friend and pupil, Sydney Cave, promotes the essential congruity of their staurology, Anglican clergyman John Kenneth Mozley seeks to distance the two thinkers. It may be, however, that Mozley is reading Campbell through Moberly.

27. As *Lux Mundi* stresses. See Lyttelton, “The Atonement,” 275–312.

4. Both Forsyth and Campbell reject the doctrine of limited atonement. It was humanity that was united to Christ in the incarnation; it was neither a select group nor "an event in the individual's religious experience."²⁸
5. While Forsyth lays more weight on the legal aspects of the atonement than does Campbell, both reject those staurologies which construe God's action in the cross as a legalistic (and mechanistic) outworking of the divine decrees in history. The primacy of the filial relation that Campbell champions does not need to be at the cost of the royal relationship, as Forsyth models. Like Campbell, Forsyth sought to not deny the judicial aspects of the atonement but to, in James Orr's words, "remove from it the hard legal aspect it is apt to assume when treated as a purely external fact, without regard to its inner spiritual content."²⁹ Neither Campbell nor Forsyth deny the atonement's reference to the vindication of divine Torah. Their concern, however, is to include alongside this vindication the atonement's prospective elements—that is, filiality. In so doing they posit divine justice as serving God's broader soteriological purposes, discarding any presumed antithesis between divine justice and love.

In 1909, Forsyth gave a series of talks at a ministers' study conference during which he declared "I hope you have read McLeod Campbell on the Atonement. Every minister ought to know that book, and know it well." Forsyth shares with Campbell's "great, fine, holy book"³⁰ the notion that the atonement includes a confessional, or penitential, element. Indeed, the cross is "the Great Confessional."³¹ There are not a few pas-

28. Jenkins, *A Comparative Study*, 7.

29. Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, 341.

30. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, 148. Forsyth's work proceeds on the assumption that most of Campbell's work on the atonement is beyond debate. Certainly most of the points made by Forsyth in his essay on the atonement were made previously in one way or another by Campbell. The fact that many of Campbell's previously debated ideas were widely accepted by the turn of the century is evident in a series of articles on the atonement published in *The Christian World* during the winter of 1899–1900, later published as Godet, *et al.*, *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, wherein Campbell's name is relied upon for support more often than any other.

31. Justyn Terry misconstrues when he writes: "It is unfortunate that Forsyth entitles one of his chapters in *The Work of Christ*, 'The Great Confessional' . . . with all its connotations of the confession of sin rather than the confession of holiness." Terry, *The Justifying Judgement of God*, 96; cf. Smail, *Once and For All*, 11–12.

sages in which Forsyth appears to offer unqualified agreement with Campbell. One example will suffice:

The faith which [Christ] alone has power to wake is already offered to God in the offering of all His powers and of His finished work. That obedience of ours which Christ alone is able to create, is already set out in Him before God, implicit in that mighty and subduing holiness of His in which God is always well-pleased. All His obedience and holiness is not only fair and beloved of God, but it is also great with the penitent holiness of the race He sanctifies. Our faith is already present in His oblation. Our sanctification is already presented in our justification. Our repentance is already acting in His confession.³²

FORSYTH'S ONE OBJECTION

While Campbell's "positive doctrines found a broad measure of acceptance,"³³ and his approach "more 'objective' and coherent than his critics have allowed,"³⁴ identifying his "serious shortcomings" continued well beyond his lifetime.³⁵ The most serious concern concerned Campbell's notion of Christ's vicarious ministry. Forsyth's "one criticism," too, concerns Campbell's sponsoring the notion of Christ becoming humanity's "great confessor" before God.³⁶ With John Scott Lidgett and Horace Bushnell, Forsyth asks, "How could Christ in any real sense confess a sin, even a racial sin, with whose guilt He had nothing

32. Forsyth, *Work*, 193–94.

33. Tuttle, *Campbell*, 112. Tuttle identifies James Orr, R.W. Dale, John S. Lidgett, P. T. Forsyth, and James Denney as among the not-uncritical-but-largely-sympathetic readers of Campbell's work. See Tuttle, *Campbell*, 114–16). Orr and Dale are particularly uncomfortable with Campbell's notion of vicarious repentance. See Tuttle, *Campbell*, 127. Also Lidgett, *Spiritual Principle*, 171; Bushnell, *Forgiveness and Law*, 28–29. More recent interest is largely due to the work of the Torrances, and their students. See Torrance, *Rationality*, 145; Elmer M. Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 97–123.

34. Stevenson, *Campbell*, 272.

35. Lidgett, *Spiritual Principle*, 175. See Stevenson, *Campbell*, 8–15. Charles Gore, B. B. Warfield, John Stott, Vincent Taylor, R. S. Paul, and George Carey all accuse Campbell of evacuating any Anselm-like objective content from the atonement. See Hart, "Anselm," 314–15; Stott, *Cross*, 141–42; Paul, *Atonement*, 140–49; Carey, *The Gate of Glory*, 125–30. Others have considered Campbell a successor to Abelard, Socinus, and Schleiermacher. Bewkes, "John McLeod Campbell," 252; and Bewkes, *Legacy of a Christian Mind*, 220.

36. Campbell, *Sermons* 2, 28.238; cf. Stevenson, *Campbell*, 145–47.

in common?"³⁷ Campbell agrees that there is "this difference between Christ and us, that Christ, being perfectly holy had not personal sin to confess,"³⁸ but he does not share Forsyth's view that therefore Christ had "nothing in common" with humanity's guilt—so complete is God's identification with humanity in the incarnation.³⁹

Forsyth maintains that Christ could not bear the guilt that only a sinner could bear. While we can, Forsyth says, speak of Christ's vicarious *obedience*, it is senseless to speak of vicarious *repentance*, for Christ had no personal guilt to confess: Christ bore the curse of guilt, rather than guilt itself. Forsyth argues that while our union with Christ is the source of our repentance, Christ could not repent for us. While guilt's sting was never Christ's (he could not know what it means to confess his own sin), he alone could enter and feel to its full force the awful atmosphere of guilt, effect its death and evoke and enable our repentance. "He saw sin as it appeared before God. Only one who sees it so can understand it."⁴⁰ While Christ alone could offer due recognition to wounded Torah, he could never know in his person the sense of affliction that attends the woundings. While the penalty and judgment could never be ours to bear, the repentance, Forsyth avers, is ours alone.⁴¹

It could be argued that the difference here between Forsyth and Campbell is one of emphasis rather than of substance, of accent rather than of theology itself. Where they do part company, however, is in the

37. Forsyth, *Work*, 148. "Here McLeod Campbell and Moberly seem to me to come short. They do not get their eye sufficiently away from the confession of sin." Forsyth, *Cruciality*, 206; Forsyth, *Work*, 149.

38. Campbell, *Sermons* 2, 28:238; cf. Lidgett, *Spiritual Principle*, 177–78; Bushnell, *Forgiveness and Law*, 28–32. Alfred Cave argues that as attractive as the doctrine of vicarious confession is, it remains foreign to Scripture. Cave, *Sacrifice*, 358–62.

39. The argument is hampered by a lack of precision or definition in Campbell's employment of the grammar of "vicarious repentance;" a phrase that he does not in fact employ at all. See Stevenson, *Campbell*, 55. It seems that what Campbell mostly has in mind is "confession" more than "repentance," the latter being subsumed under the former. See Campbell, *Atonement*, 119–20.

40. Forsyth, "The Paradox of Christ," 129.

41. Forsyth, "The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought," 76; cf. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 178: "Faith in the Son is the one 'work' which God demands of the human being." The complaint that the notion of a sinless Christ offering "repentance" vicariously is meaningless fails to appreciate that far from being a disqualification, it is precisely Christ's sinlessness that enables him to confess human sin and submit fully to its consequent judgement. It is worth noting here that Forsyth makes no reference in this context to the representative and substitutionary ministry of Israel's high priest.

contribution that *sinners* make to the confession of sin. While Campbell contends that Christ has fulfilled “whatever is necessary to consummate the perfect condemnation of sin,”⁴² Forsyth maintains that if we are to take seriously the moral dignity and responsibility of creation, then genuine human response to God—what Tom Smail terms our “authentic” response⁴³—*cannot be offered vicariously*. At this point, Forsyth also has an ally in Emil Brunner: “If responsibility be eliminated, the whole meaning of human existence disappears.”⁴⁴

Forsyth is concerned that something not be done that belittles human responsibility, leaving us “too little committed.”⁴⁵ He conceives of the new humanity as the company of those who answer and seal Christ’s act with their own faith.⁴⁶ This is why the notion of substitution, when pushed too far, is distortive, finally excluding us from any real unity with Christ whose work includes us and commits us to new life.⁴⁷ Forsyth acknowledges that there can be no experience of assurance or filiality except by faith in “an objective something, done over our heads, and complete without any reference to our response or our despoise.”⁴⁸ But while the greatest thing ever done in the world was “done for us behind our backs”⁴⁹—submerged and largely hidden like an iceberg—it does not stay behind our backs but creates a turning from darkness to the new

42. Moberly, *Atonement*, 129; cf. Moberly, *Atonement*, 110. Forsyth is a little selective in his reading of Moberly, setting up a caricature that does not entirely reflect Moberly’s position, a position which, to be fair, includes a place for the human penitential response to Christ’s penitence. See, for example, Moberly, *Atonement*, 118, 121, 129.

43. Smail, *The Giving Gift*, 110.

44. Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 258.

45. Forsyth, *Work*, 225.

46. *Ibid.*, 227.

47. It is questionable that Campbell would have entertained the use of the notion of vicarious repentance if it seemed to bear the substitutionary ideas which had been affixed to the word “vicarious.” Thus Lidgett noted that the notion of a repentant Christ is “The faulty expression of a great truth” (Lidgett, *Spiritual Principle*, 177). And Denney referred to it as “an objectionable name for the indubitable and essential facts” (Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 260). Even if the grammar is problematic and without “even a faint allusion” in the New Testament (so Mackintosh, *Some Aspects of Christian Belief*, 79), however, Campbell clearly believed that the idea is correct, and called for by the New Testament’s wider witness to the Gospel itself.

48. *Ibid.*, 187; cf. Tymms, *The Christian Idea of Atonement*, 259; Warfield, “Atonement,” vol. 9, 266, 272; Moberly, *Atonement*, 352.

49. Forsyth, *God the Holy Father*, 19.

reality. While the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Calvinists were right to concentrate on the atonement's action *on God*, they treated that work, Forsyth believes, "in a way far too objective."⁵⁰ In his own day, however, the accent had shifted to an equally-distortive subjectivism. Forsyth calls for a "balance of aspects," a thinking together "the various aspects of the Cross . . . [making] them enrich and not exclude one another."⁵¹ The atonement puts creation on a new footing, but remains incomplete until it reach us, claim us, affect us, and involve us.⁵² Forsyth urged, the work finished "*for us* was the first condition of doing anything *with us*;"⁵³ the *with us* being an integral aspect of the *for us*. Thus the new humanity is not a *fait accompli* in the cross. If it were, creation would be shut down to a natural system, and moral action rendered meaningless. Without the unfinished world of "ought" and its tension with "is," there is no moral possibility, for action is meaningless in an absolutely comprehended world. To account for the moral agent whom we know, the redemptive act must be final, but only proleptically. Its finality lies in the new relation between God and humanity, in the faithfulness of God to God's own self, and in an ongoing series of "acts of choice, in which the personality asserts itself against the processes that would but hurry it, as a thing, down a stream."⁵⁴

With Campbell (and probably Moberly) in his sights, Forsyth hones in on the question of personal guilt. A sinless Christ could never vicariously confess guilt, nor "bear the penalty of remorse."⁵⁵ There is no ledger transfer of guilt from the guilty to the guiltless as if God was involved in some game of "divine finance" in which God lifted our load onto another's back.⁵⁶ There is something about guilt, Forsyth insists, "which can only be confessed by the guilty. 'I did it.' That kind of confession Christ could never make." Sin is so deeply graven into our humanity

50. Forsyth, *Work*, 220.

51. *Ibid.*, 221.

52. *Ibid.*, 172. Behind this assertion is Forsyth's conviction that reality is both personal and moral, the whole of history being constituted by choice and act. Personality and act complement one another as the content of the moral structure of reality. See Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, 49; McKay, "The Moral Structure of Reality"; also Moberly, *Atonement*, 136–53; Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 308–9.

53. Forsyth, *Father*, 19.

54. Forsyth, *Justification*, 49.

55. Forsyth, *Work*, 157; cf. Moberly, *Atonement*, 117–18, 131.

56. Forsyth, *Cruciality*, 79.

that it cannot be transferred by legal fiat or any other means from one to another. Therefore, in order “to be of final value,” Forsyth insists, “the atoning judgment must be also within the conscience of the guilty.”⁵⁷ To be sure, Forsyth avers that this confession cannot be effectively made “until we are in union with Christ and His great lone work of perfectly and practically confessing the holiness of God. There is a racial confession that can only be made by the holy; and there is a personal confession that can only be made by the guilty.”⁵⁸ Forsyth maintains that it is impossible for sinners to confess the holiness of God because their very being *as sinners* undermines their confession. So, with Campbell and with almost the unanimous weight of the tradition behind him, Forsyth reiterates that God did for humanity what humanity was unable, and unwilling, to do. *But*, and with one exception, Christ could not confess in our stead the guilt that only the guilty can confess: “We alone, the guilty, can make that confession.”⁵⁹ Forsyth proceeds to argue that although this is part of the confession the guilty must make, it is not done unaided, for the confession of the guilty cannot be made effectively apart from the great confessional of the cross which is “the source of the truest confession of our sin that we can make.”⁶⁰

VICARIOUS REPENTANCE

Forsyth vies that the notion of vicarious repentance is meaningless. Even if we only refer (as Moberly does) to the ‘supreme’ or ‘perfect’ nature of Christ’s penitence instead of ours, but undergirding ours,⁶¹ Forsyth

57. Forsyth, *Work*, 191; cf. Brunner, *The Mediator*, 534: “If we could repent as we should no atonement would be needed, for then repentance would be atonement. Then the righteousness of God would have been satisfied. But this is precisely what we cannot do.”

58. Forsyth, *Work*, 151; see Forsyth, *Work*, 189.

59. Forsyth, *Work*, 151.

60. Forsyth, *Work*, 151–52.

61. Moberly, *Atonement*, 129–30. Newman pushes the notion further in his description of Christ’s passion: “He cries to His Father, as if He were the criminal, not the victim; His agony takes the form of guilt and compunction. He is doing penance, He is making confession; He is exercising contrition with a reality and a virtue infinitely greater than that of all Saints and penitents together; for He is the One Victim for us all, the sole Satisfaction, the real Penitent, all but the real sinner.” Newman, *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*, 253. See also Newman, *The Dream of Gerontius*, 62: “Jesu! by that mount of sins which crippled Thee; Jesu! by that sense of guilt which stifled Thee.”

is adamant that there is no sense in which Christ could repent for us: "There is an atoning substitution and a penal; but a penitential there is not."⁶² He insists that Christ could not directly offer a repentance "wide enough to cover the sin of a guilty world" precisely because he could not feel the pathos of guilt.⁶³ Smail agrees: "The notion of vicarious repentance carries an inherent contradiction between the adjective and the noun. Only the one who has committed the sin is in a position to repent of it. Like punishment and confession, repentance is something that is inalienably personal to the sinner and cannot justly be transferred from him to one who like Christ has not sinned at all."⁶⁴

Forsyth also avers that "rivers of water from our eyes will not wash out the guilt of the past; nor will they undo the evil we have set afloat in souls far gone beyond our reach or control,"⁶⁵ but the penalty Christ has borne works itself out in the represented through *their metanoia*.⁶⁶ Forsyth's concern is that an over-objectification of the atonement means that a "finished religion would then be set up without the main thing—the acknowledgment by the guilty. That acknowledgment, that repentance, would then be outside the complete act, and would be at best but a sequel of it." In order to give reconciliation its "full and final value, i.e., its value to God" we ought to "include in some way the effect in the cause."⁶⁷ Therefore, Christ's confession elicits a response of penitence in human beings that God accepts as adequate satisfaction for sin. God's holy love goes to work in the human conscience deepening

62. Forsyth, "Atonement," 84.

63. Forsyth, *Work*, 189; see also Forsyth, *Work*, 191–92.

64. Smail, "Can One Man Die," 86. Also *ibid.*, 90; Smail, *Once*, 161–62. Smail accuses Torrance of blurring the boundary here between Christology and Pneumatology. Kettler argues that Smail has misread Torrance at this point. Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ*, 139–42. Both Moberly and Holmes offer a defence of vicarious "punishment" where Christ is the "corporate personality" or "public person." Moberly, *Atonement*, 118–19, 130; Holmes, "Can Punishment Bring Peace?" 120–21. At this point, Forsyth and Moberly are in agreement. See Forsyth, *Work*, 150, 159, 172, 184; Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, 352–53; Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*, 364; Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority in Relation to Certainty, Sanctity and Society*, 190; Forsyth, *Revelation Old and New*, 34.

65. Forsyth, *Work*, 203.

66. Warfield, "Modern Theories of the Atonement," vol 9. 292. Warfield articulates that Forsyth's position is that human redemption rests ultimately on Christ's work, but proximately on our own repentance.

67. Forsyth, *Work*, 187–88; cf. Forsyth, *Work*, 191.

error into sin, sin into guilt, and guilt into repentance. Anything short of this, Forsyth contends, “would be but an anodyne and not a grace, a self-Battering unction to the soul and not the peace of God.”⁶⁸ Still, human faith and repentance constitute part of Christ’s one complete act of new creation and are not mere sequels to it. The creation of obedience in human persons is therefore also the work of the obedient Christ who reproduces in humanity the same “kind of holiness which alone can please God after all that has come and gone.”⁶⁹ In Christ, God authors his own satisfaction.⁷⁰ The “Yes” of the cross from humanity’s side really is a “Yes.” But it is a “Yes” that does not reach its satisfactory end until it finds voice from the lips and lives of those that the Crucified One is not ashamed to call his sisters and brothers. God receives Christ’s confession not only because it is the perfect offering, but also because laden in it is the anticipation of humanity’s confession.⁷¹

Christ’s practical and adequate recognition of the broken law is an end in itself—it satisfies God. But because reconciliation involves two parties, Christ’s work also creates space in which the Last Adam’s vicarious and loving sacrifice is effected in the new humanity through repentance which was, in Forsyth’s words, “the one thing that God’s gracious love required for restored communion and complete forgiveness.” God could now deal with us as God had felt about us from before the foundation of the world, thus satisfying “the claim and harmony of His holy nature” and “the redemptive passion of His gracious heart.”⁷² Expressed otherwise, Christ’s going to the cross involved “bringing His sheaves with Him. In presenting Himself He offers implicitly and proleptically the new Humanity His holy work creates.”⁷³

ASSESSING FORSYTH’S OBJECTION

Forsyth accepts the claim that Christ’s obedience was in some sense vicarious, and he entertains no illusions that a human being might come to God unaided. This would, he asserts, “destroy grace” and suggest that

68. *Ibid.*, 181.

69. *Ibid.*, 203.

70. See *ibid.*, *Work*, 203–6.

71. *Ibid.*, 209.

72. Forsyth, “Atonement,” 86.

73. Forsyth, *Work*, 192.

one could satisfy God if only God would but give one “time to collect the wherewithal.”⁷⁴ The capacity of positive response to God is not “natural,” as it were, but has to be created – God creating *in* us what God promises *for* us. This, Forsyth urges, is “the Creator’s self-assurance of His own regenerative power.”⁷⁵

But I want to press Forsyth further here and ask whether his critique of Campbell is not undermined by some of his own rhetoric. Forsyth maintains both (i) that confession and repentance must come from sin’s side, and yet (ii) no sinful human could duly repent.⁷⁶ Does not Campbell’s notion, therefore, provide a most satisfying basis for constructing a theology of confession, repentance and Christian discipleship? Forsyth may reply that this grants logic too big a hand and fails to account for the paradoxical nature of faith. But, with T. F. Torrance, I suggest that in a profound and proper sense we must speak of Jesus as “constituting in himself the very substance of our conversion,” repentance and personal decision, apart from which “all so-called repentance and conversion are empty” and vain.⁷⁷ Yes *we* do repent, and, as it must if it is to come home, it is really *our* repentance (as Campbell was also keen to stress, especially in his sermons). But it is a repentance that finds its authorship, reception, and finishing in another. Our repentance, like the rest of our salvation, is given to us *as gift*, made possible because of the vicarious repentance of the firstborn from the dead and by the grace of the Spirit. If Calvin is correct to assert that “our whole salvation and *all* its parts are comprehended in Christ”⁷⁸ and that salvation involves human repentance, then however difficult the mechanics might be to explain, Christ performed precisely such an act. As in prayer, we can pray because Christ is praying. Similarly, our repentance is made possible and its reception certain because of the perfect repentance of Christ. The important thing here is that, as Forsyth avers, “what Christ presented to God for His complete joy and satisfaction was a perfect racial obedience . . . God’s holiness found itself again in the humbled holiness of Christ’s

74. Ibid., 212.

75. Ibid., 212; cf. Lidgett, *Spiritual Principle*, 407–8.

76. Forsyth, *Work*, 212.

77. Torrance, *Mediation*, 86.

78. Calvin, *Inst.*, 2.16.19, italics added.

‘public person.’”⁷⁹ It is this notion of Christ as “public person” which will occupy the remainder of this essay.

CHRIST AS REPRESENTATIVE HEAD

Given Forsyth’s acceptance of the notion of vicarious confession (a confession which Campbell maintains “must have been present”⁸⁰ in Christ’s intercessory ministry) it is difficult to understand his objection to Campbell’s framing of Christ’s “penitent substitution.” Surely both form part of Christ’s high-priestly and royal ministry in which Christ mediates God to humanity and humanity to God, fully re-presenting *fallen* Adam where Adam is incapable of doing so itself.⁸¹ Moreover, God has so constituted humanity that what happens to our Head happens for all. Just as elders of some “nations” decide whether the community will embrace the Christian narrative or not, and just as Israel’s High Priest represented the nation before God (or David represented Israel in his battle with the Philistines’ own representative, the “champion from Gath” (1 Sam 17:23), the fate of both nations being decided vicariously), in humanity’s Representative and Head, humanity’s destiny is gathered and decided.⁸² To posit otherwise is to break up the human community. Here, more than anywhere, individualism is disabled. We might recall here Paul Ricoeur’s contention that “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought

79. Forsyth, *Work*, 129; cf. Forsyth, *Work*, 228.

80. Campbell, *Atonement*, 131; cf. Campbell, *Atonement*, 141; Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, 40.

81. Here, Lidgett’s Abelardian word concerning Christ’s death as “The perfect expression of the spiritual intention of those who, through repentance, abandon the false” betrays the very Achilles of which Campbell was so aware (Lidgett, *Spiritual Principle*, 178). The notion of priesthood is most fully worked out by Forsyth in his ecclesiology and teaching on pastoral ministry. See Forsyth, *Authority*, 283; Forsyth, *The Charter of the Church*, 56–59; Forsyth, *Congregationalism and Reunion*, 57, 73–78; Forsyth, *Father*, 95; Forsyth, *Faith, Freedom and the Future*, 174; Forsyth, *Person*, 12; Forsyth, *Revelation*, 97–99, 132–33, 140; Forsyth, *Rome, Reform and Reaction*, 40, 47, 59, 178–96, 204, 206, 209, 212–14, 223, 229; Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 145–46, 184–85.

82. See, for example, Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 88–94; Moberly, *Atonement*, 352. The notion also presents itself in the decision of a head of state to go to war, a decision that has direct implications for potentially millions of people, whether they approve of the decision or not. We also use the idea to describe our mood when *our* sports team wins, or loses, a match: “We won!” “We lost!” A further example might be when, on February 13, 2008, the Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, offered a long-awaited apology to the stolen generations on behalf of all Australians.

of without the other, that instead one passes into the other.”⁸³ Only in community can one possibly exist as an individual. Who *I* am cannot be realized apart from the race. So when preaching on our dying and rising in Christ, the young minister of Row expressed it thus: “When Christ gave his flesh to death, willingly and freely, he did not as an individual, but as our head and representative . . . Christ did not suffer as a private person, but as a head and representative, so also, all rose when Christ rose: he rose not as a private person, but as a Head.”⁸⁴

Both McLeod Campbell and Forsyth concur that in the sacrifice of this one man is the concentration of all. It is, in Colin Gunton’s words, “The kind of offering that, so to speak, longs to offer not only itself, but all flesh.”⁸⁵ The vicarious response made on humanity’s behalf is not made apart from us, but includes us precisely because Jesus is one *with* us and one *of* us, born not only of the Spirit but also of Mary. That is why understanding Christ’s work as *only* representative is inadequate.⁸⁶ As Forsyth saw, the notion of Christ as “Representative” (taken in isolation) suggests too much of the idea of him as a “spiritual protagonist” who draws his power and authority democratically from those he represents.⁸⁷ Instead, Christ’s “relation to us is royal.” As humanity’s “federal person,” Christ is “head of the human race by *his voluntary self-identification*,” “all humanity is in him and in His act”⁸⁸—a decision that does neither await nor require our approval!

83. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 3. One implication here is that “To do evil is to make another person suffer.” Ricœur, “Evil,” 259; cf. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 346–51. Buber and Marcel also argue that “I” is never a self-contained, self-comprehending and self-sufficient referent but can exist only in the direction of a “Thou” and a “We” lest it become a hell for itself. Marcel, “Structure de l’Espérance,” 80. See also Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 51, 54–57.

84. Campbell, *Sermons* 2, 23.95–96; cf. Barth, *CD* IV/1, 236, 295; Erskine, *Brazen Serpent*, 44.

85. Gunton, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 193.

86. While Forsyth (with Pope and Lidgett) preferred the word “Representative” to “substitution,” the fact is that he was not enamoured of either. His preference was for the word “surety.” See Forsyth, “Atonement,” 83–84; Forsyth, *Authority*, 81–82; Forsyth, *Cruciality*, 85, 141, 157–58; Forsyth, *The Preaching of Jesus*, 35; Forsyth, *Work*, 116, 126, 129, 153, 158–61, 172, 182, 191–94, 206, 210–15, 227–28; Forsyth, *Father*, 93; cf. Pope, *The Person of Christ*, 51; Denney, *Atonement*, 97–99.

87. Forsyth, *Work*, 210. Denney expresses similar concern, though contends that we retain the grammar and emphasise that this Representative was “not produced by us, but given to us.” Denney, *Atonement*, 99, 102; cf. Smail, *Once*, 149.

88. Forsyth, *Work*, 210, 172, 159.

CHRIST AS SUBSTITUTE

Jesus Christ is “the man in our place as he was in Barabbas,”⁸⁹ doing something for us which we *could not* do for ourselves. Forsyth’s rejection of Campbell’s notion of vicarious repentance is fundamentally over the question of how deep this “could not do for ourselves” reaches. Could it be that the doctrine of total depravity finds deeper resonance in Campbell’s Presbyterianism than it does in Forsyth’s Congregationalism? Campbell quotes with approval George Whitefield: “our repentance needeth to be repented of, and our very tears to be washed in the blood of Christ.”⁹⁰ While Forsyth certainly accepts that “Christ had to save us from what we were too far gone to feel,”⁹¹ humanity’s depravity, for Forsyth, is not total in fact, only in principle: “There was still greatness and goodness among men, even among some who failed to see [Christ’s].”⁹²

If, in the incarnation, Christ became not only “found among sinners” but, as Luther argued, “the one transgressor,” “the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer, etc., there has ever been anywhere in the world,”⁹³ and human repentance is as called for as confession, then Forsyth’s objection is mute. If in Christ is one whose “flesh differed not in one particle from mine”⁹⁴ and so is fully able to “sympathize” with fallen, weak and distressed humanity,⁹⁵ does Forsyth’s portrait open the door to a docetic, or at least pseudo-Socinian, Christology, a Socinianism that he fought so long and hard against?⁹⁶

89. See Barth, *CD IV/1*, 230, 253.

90. Campbell, *Atonement*, 123.

91. Forsyth, *Work*, 18.

92. Forsyth, *Father*, 56; cf. Forsyth, *Authority*, 404; Forsyth, *Christian Aspects of Evolution*, 22; Forsyth, *Father*, 100; Forsyth, *Freedom*, 94, 109; Forsyth, *Justification*, 143.

93. Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26:277. Cf. Campbell, *Atonement*, 124. This theme was already present in Campbell’s Row sermons. See Campbell, *Sermons 1:238*; cf. McLean, *The Cursed Christ*, 144.

94. Campbell, *Notes of Sermons*, 1.8.7. Cited in Stevenson, *Campbell*, 84.

95. Rom 8:3; Heb 4:15. See Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry*, 75; Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol 1. 130; Colyer, *Torrance*, 85, 88, 93, 109–15; König, *Here Am I*, 88; Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ*, 400–404; Ellingworth, “For our sake God Made him Share our Sin?” 237–41.

96. What I have in mind here is Socinianism’s denial of *substitutionary* atonement and forensic imputation. Until the close of the nineteenth century, Socinianism was almost synonymous with Unitarianism, and both—alongside Arianism—came under Forsyth’s sustained criticism. See Forsyth, *Person*, 76–78; 246, 328; Forsyth, “Revelation and the Person of Christ,” 133; Forsyth, *Work*, 218–19. On Unitarianism see Forsyth,

While it would certainly be over-reaching to offer an unqualified “Yes” here, by rejecting the full measure of Christ’s vicarious work Forsyth’s Christology appears—at this point—more Socinian and less Athanasian than he would like. Such a move threatens to undermine the very basis of assurance that Campbell and Forsyth seek to bear witness to in the Incarnation *alone*, and re-open the door to a works-righteousness, a move which neither theologian wishes to sponsor. There is no question for Forsyth that in Christ, *God* entered the world, announced himself, gave himself. Jesus really stood in *God’s* place. The question I am directing at Forsyth is whether or not he can say that Christ equally stood in *humanity’s* place. In Forsyth’s defense, his polemic targets an over-humanized Christ gaining popularity in his day. Still, if the sinless Christ can identify with humanity enough to confess human sin, then it is a small leap—if any at all—to say that he also offers vicarious repentance.

It is at this point that my criticisms of Forsyth’s Christology converge somewhat with Gerhard Forde’s: that Forsyth’s Jesus dies “too much like a good Kantian. There are still too many roses on the cross.”⁹⁷ If Forde’s concern here can be sustained, then this may assist us to see why Forsyth shies away from fully identifying Christ with fallen humanity, thus making any vicarious confession meaningless, even impossible. If, on the other hand, the confession of the cross was made by one who has truly entered “the deep stream of pollution in our flesh”⁹⁸ whilst retaining, in the Spirit, uncompromised fellowship with God, then his action necessarily involves humanity and God, affecting both parties in such a way that the grammar of vicarious confession and repentance is not only appropriate but necessary if we are both to understand God’s humanity and ours, and bear witness to the good news that incarnation means grace from first to last.

CHRIST AS HIGH PRIEST

One thing I have tried to articulate in this essay is that Forsyth’s criticism of Campbell is inconsistent with his own theological matrix. In Forsyth’s own words, “The chief function of Christ’s love was to repre-

Authority, 224; Forsyth, *Cruciality*, 74; Forsyth, *Missions in State and Church*, 33–34; Forsyth, “Revelation,” 115. Stott falsely assesses Campbell as standing “in the same general tradition” as Socinus (Stott, *Cross*, 141).

97. Forde, “The Work of Christ,” 34–35; cf. Terry, *Judgement*, 79, 97.

98. Campbell, *Fragments of Expositions of Scripture*, 18.275.

sent man in a solidary way, a priestly way.”⁹⁹ If humanity’s High Priest can confess God’s holiness and work out a real reconciliation “from the flesh”¹⁰⁰—that is, in “entire identification,” “perfect sympathy” and “moral solidarity” with fallen humanity¹⁰¹—then certainly he also, as High Priest, confesses the sin and guilt on behalf of those for whom he has undertaken responsibility. Surely this is what a High Priest is ordained to do. As Forsyth himself observes: “What God sought was nothing so pagan as a mere victim outside our conscience and over our heads. It was a Confessor, a Priest, one taken from among men . . . His offering of a holy obedience to God’s judgment is therefore valuable to God for us just because of that moral solidarity with us which also makes Him such a moral power upon us and in us.”¹⁰²

Few have put this more forcefully than James Torrance who, citing Calvin, and commenting on the Yom Kippur liturgy, observes that when the high priest entered into the holy presence of Yahweh in the sanctuary, “all Israel entered *in his person* . . . Conversely, when he vicariously confessed their sins, and interceded for them before God, God accepted them as his forgiven people *in the person of their high priest*.”¹⁰³ Certainly every theory of the atonement reveals not only the paradox of the cross but also its scandalous mystery, a mystery captured in the Yom Kippur liturgy. For Campbell, “The central mystery is the absorption of God’s wrath in Christ’s own perfect response to God’s just judgment *and [Christ’s] realization of sin in his own spirit*. In this, somehow, is salvation. In this, somehow, God’s justice is satisfied and human need is met.”¹⁰⁴

Forsyth maintains that Christ could not offer vicarious repentance because he had no sense, pathos or personal experience of guilt, and then proceeds to distinguish between *actual* guilt and the *sense* of guilt. What Christ confessed, Forsyth insists, was the former without the latter. But then Forsyth also wants to demand that it is precisely this *actual* guilt that must be confessed and that this “essence of repentance . . . only a sinless Christ could really do.”¹⁰⁵ He outlines the dilemma: “How shall

99. Forsyth, *Preaching*, 250.

100. Campbell, *Fragments of Truth*, 258.

101. Forsyth, *Preaching*, 250; cf. Mackintosh, *Person*, 400.

102. Forsyth, *Work*, 190.

103. Torrance, “Vicarious Humanity,” 139.

104. Van Dyk, *Desire*, 114, italics added.

105. Forsyth, *Work*, 189.

I know how much repentance is deep enough? Where find a repentance wide enough to cover the sin of a guilty world? Could Christ offer that?” Campbell says “Yes,” this is precisely what Christ offers. And Forsyth: “No; directly, He could not. He could not offer it as a pathos, a personal experience, for He had no guilt.”¹⁰⁶ While properly avoiding the temptation to second guess Jesus’ psychology, Forsyth’s objection to Campbell’s notion of vicarious repentance makes greater sense if the repentance that Christ offers is on behalf of an individual, or even a select group of individuals (though the latter may be more easily defended). The objection, however, becomes more difficult to sustain if that vicarious repentance is offered by and as one who is the head of a corporate body for whom one has taken responsibility.¹⁰⁷ Thus Luther’s reminder that “we should not imagine Christ as an innocent and private person.”¹⁰⁸ Rather in his sinless humanity, Christ enters the matrix of besmirched human community—“a despairing and broken world trapped in lostness”¹⁰⁹—into “all the responsibilities that sin has created for us”¹¹⁰ and completely assumes—as the new Head of that community—“the human condition of estrangement from God,”¹¹¹ converting a “Lancelot race”¹¹² into “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet 2:9).

106. Ibid., 189.

107. See Crisp, “Non-Penal Substitution,” 429–30. Crisp follows Forsyth in addressing the notion of where the representative of a group is said to offer an apology for the past misdeeds of the group (or some of the group) of which s/he is a representative, citing as an example the regret expressed by the Japanese government for their part in wartime atrocities. “But,” he writes, “we cannot take such actions with metaphysical seriousness. They have to do with the observation of diplomatic convention, or perhaps of international etiquette, or courtesy. Real regret is surely offered in many such cases; I am not denying that. But the representative of any group or nation cannot literally offer an apology for sinful actions committed by some members of the community he or she represents, if by apology is meant a real act of contrition and repentance for past sin.” One wonders, therefore, how Crisp understands what might be going on when Israel’s high priest literally clothes himself with the full symbolic weight of the community he represents before God in the holy of holies. Surely he does not want to suggest that what is going on here is merely an example of “diplomatic convention,” “etiquette,” or “courtesy.”

108. Luther, *Works* 26, 287.

109. Kruger, *The Parable of the Dancing God*, 28.

110. Denney, *Atonement*, 93; cf. Hunter, *Forsyth*, 63.

111. Rossé, *The Cry of Jesus on the Cross*, 67.

112. Forsyth, *The Church, the Gospel and Society*, 102.

This does not make human confession or repentance accidental or redundant. On the contrary, it creates the necessity of such creaturely response, and also the assurance that such confession might be received by God. Forsyth *and Campbell* are equally concerned that the fact of personal confession be not undermined. It is precisely because sin is personal that it cannot be forgiven by divine fiat but only by a personal act. And it is precisely because one from the sin-gnarled stock of Adam has already offered to God the perfect repentance that we can offer our repentance. This we do not out of our own “moral awareness, inner strength and spiritual resolve”¹¹³ but in the Great Repenter himself, and as we are led by the Spirit to confess our “Amen” to the “Amen” already offered to the Father on our behalf. The pastoral power of such a theology is given voice in James Torrance’s stirring hymn, “I know not how to pray, O Lord,” written during a visit to Australia in 1996:

I know not how to pray, O Lord,
So weak and frail am I.
Lord Jesus to Your outstretched arms
In love I daily fly,
For You have prayed for me.

I know not how to pray, O Lord,
O’erwhelmed by grief am I,
Lord Jesus in Your wondrous love
You hear my anxious cry
And ever pray for me.

I know not how to pray, O Lord,
For full of tears and pain
I groan, yet in my soul, I know
My cry is not in vain.
O teach me how to pray!

Although I know not how to pray,
Your Spirit intercedes,
Convincing me of pardoned sin;
For me in love He pleads
And teaches me to pray.

O take my wordless sighs and fears

113. Redding, *Prayer*, 199.

And make my prayers Your own.
O put Your prayer within my lips
And lead me to God’s throne
That I may love like You.

O draw me to Your Father’s heart,
Lord Jesus, when I pray,
And whisper in my troubled ear,
“Your sins are washed away.
Come home with Me today!”

At home within our Father’s house,
Your Father, Lord, and mine,
I’m lifted up by Your embrace
To share in love divine
Which floods my heart with joy.

Transfigured by Your glory, Lord,
Renewed in heart and mind,
I’ll sing angelic song of praise
With joy which all can find
In You alone, O Lord.

I’ll love You, O my Father God,
Through Jesus Christ, Your Son.
I’ll love You in the Spirit, Lord,
In whom we all are one,
Made holy by Your love.¹¹⁴

The Gospel commands us to repent, to believe, to take up the cross, and to follow Christ. That, as T. F. Torrance has shown, is “something that each of us must do, for no other human being can substitute for us in that ultimate act of man in answer to God—no other, that is, except Jesus.”¹¹⁵ Reluctance to recognize that Jesus Christ substitutes for us at this point threatens to make his atoning substitution for us something that is partial and not total, a move which would finally empty it of all soteriological puissance. T. F. Torrance continues:

What Jesus did was to make himself one with us in our estranged humanity when it was running away into the far country, farther

114. J. B. Torrance, “I know not how to pray, O Lord.”

115. Torrance, *Mediation*, 84.

and farther away from the Father, but through his union with it he changed it in himself, reversed its direction and converted it back in obedience and faith and love to God the Father. The Gospel tells us that at his Baptism Jesus was baptised “into repentance” (*eis metanoian*), for as the Lamb of God come to bear our sins he fulfilled that mission not in some merely superficially forensic way, though of course profound forensic elements were involved, but in a way in which he bore our sin and guilt upon his very soul which he made an offering for sin. That is to say, the Baptism with which he was baptised was a Baptism of vicarious repentance for us which he brought to its completion on the Cross where he was stricken and smitten of God for our sakes, by whose stripes we are healed. He had laid hold of us even in the depths of our human soul and mind where we are alienated from God and are at enmity with him, and altered them from within and from below in radical and complete *metanoia*, a repentant restructuring of our carnal mind, as St Paul called it, and a converting of it into a spiritual mind. As fallen human beings, we are quite unable through our own free-will to escape from our self-will for our free-will is our self-will. Likewise sin has been so ingrained into our minds that we are unable to repent and have to repent even of the kind of repentance we bring before God. But Jesus Christ laid hold of us even there in our sinful repentance and turned everything round through his holy vicarious repentance, when he bore not just upon his body but upon his human mind and soul the righteous judgments of God and resurrected our human nature in the integrity of his body, mind and soul from the grave.¹¹⁶

What took place in Christ was the “vicarious sanctification of our human nature.”¹¹⁷ In the incarnate unity of his person, Jesus of Nazareth is the divine-human Word “spoken to [humanity] from the highest and heard by [humanity] in the depths, and spoken to God out of the depths and heard by [God] in the highest.”¹¹⁸ The gospel, therefore, is not to be understood only as the Word of God drawing near to us, inviting our response, but also as including “the all-significant middle term, the divinely provided response in the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ.”¹¹⁹

116. *Ibid.*, 84–85.

117. T. F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, 205. See also T. F. Torrance, *Incarnation*, 124–25, 204.

118. T. F. Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 138.

119. *Ibid.*, 145.

HUMANITY’S PARTICIPATION IN CHRIST’S
“AMEN” BY THE SPIRIT

Forsyth and Campbell are obdurate that God’s atoning work remains incomplete apart from its subjective appropriation. So too Gunton: “Substitution is *grace*. [Christ] goes, as man, where we cannot go, under the judgment, and so comes perfected into the presence of God. But it is grace because he does so as God and as our representative, *so that he enables us to go there after him*.”¹²⁰ As Forsyth has it, Christ’s confession of God’s holiness is the ground of ours.¹²¹ This calls for faith that accepts the relation as atoned, and which is, in Campbell’s words, the glad “Amen of our individual spirits to that deep, multiform, all-embracing, harmonious Amen of humanity, in the person of the Son of God, to the mind and heart of the Father in relation to [humanity].”¹²² The new humanity created in the cross confesses the holiness of God by accepting and praising the very cross which brought an end to its old existence and created it anew. And as we draw near to God the only offering in our hands is that which was made for us and in our stead. As one has it: “We put out empty hands and bread and wine are put into them which we eat and drink . . . for we have no other offering with which to draw near to God but that one offering which is identical with Jesus Christ himself, through whom, with whom and in whom we glorify the Father.”¹²³

Forsyth believes that “the race could duly confess its sin and repent only if there arose in it One who by a perfect and impenitent holiness in Himself, and by His organic unity with us, could create such holiness in the sinful as should make the new life one long repentance transcended by faith and thankful joy. This was and is Christ’s work.”¹²⁴ Christ’s “holy soul,” he contends, was both the “cause and creator of the race’s confession, both of holiness and of sin, in a Church of the reborn.”¹²⁵ Genuine human response is possible only in union with Christ. Forsyth proceeds to name Christ “the author of our sanctification and repentance,” averring that human repentance and sanctity are of saving value before God “only as produced by the creative holiness of Christ. Christ creates our

120. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 166.

121. Forsyth, *Work*, 191.

122. Campbell, *Atonement*, 171.

123. Torrance, *Mediation*, 92.

124. Forsyth, *Work*, 213.

125. *Ibid.*, 213.

holiness because of His own sanctification of Himself—John 17:19—and His complete victory over the evil power in a life-experience of moral conflict.”¹²⁶

Forsyth is concerned that Campbell’s notion of vicarious ministry shortchanges grace’s end work in humanity. As I have suggested, Forsyth (among others¹²⁷) has misread Campbell here, and that perhaps because he seems unfamiliar with Campbell’s sermons wherein the human response of repentance and confession in the Spirit is made more explicit. By concentrating exclusively on Campbell’s *Atonement* essay and ignoring his sermons—which constitute the bulk of Campbell’s published material—Forsyth falls into the same trap as most of Campbell’s critics. While in one sense it is an understandable neglect given how quickly the Row sermons went out of print, one cannot help thinking that Forsyth’s concern may have been alleviated had he attended to Campbell’s sermons as well as his later opus, and read the latter in light of, or alongside, the former, and so gleaned a less distorted picture of Campbell’s Christology. Campbell, on the other hand, could have done more in his *Atonement* essay to recount some of his earlier teaching, assisting his readers (and especially his critics) to better appreciate his position.

Forsyth’s reservation regarding Campbell’s position is echoed in Tom Smail’s concern for that of T. F. Torrance, a Christology which is at this point Campbellian and recalls an anxiety which at least the instinct of is, I think, understandable.¹²⁸ Forsyth does not, however, respond as Smail does, in stressing the ministry of the Holy Spirit who re-creates in the human subject Christ’s perfect and vicarious response. Serving as “the natural bridge between the retrospective and the prospective,”¹²⁹ the Spirit’s work is “simply to bring over to us from Christ what he has done for us, so that it can be done in us as well.”¹³⁰ The Spirit, Smail argues, gives to our humanity all that is in Christ’s, but “Christ’s response on my behalf has to become my own response to Christ before it can take

126. Ibid.

127. Van Dyk suggests that the Spirit plays only a ‘shadowy role’ in *The Nature of the Atonement*, and Paul believes that “This omission in Campbell means that for all the apparent objectivity of Christ’s vicarious work, the effective appropriation of grace depends upon our own effort.” Paul, *Atonement*, 149.

128. See Torrance’s response in Torrance, *Mediation*, xii; cf. *ibid.*, 94.

129. Van Dyk, *Desire*, 170.

130. Smail, *Giving Gift*, 108.

effect in me . . . I must answer for myself . . . My ‘Yes’ is not just an echo of [Christ’s].”¹³¹ The Christian life, Smail avers, is that in which the Spirit brings human beings “into a wholly new order of responsiveness to God,” enabling us to do “for ourselves” what we could never do “by ourselves.”¹³² Smail writes:

The “Yes” that we say to God in Christ is our own “Yes;” yet it is ours not as an achievement that has its source in us, but as a gift of which the Giver is the Life-giving Spirit. The paradox . . . summed up in the phrase “*for* ourselves but not *by* ourselves” is the mystery of his relationship with us.¹³³

While one may certainly sympathize here with Smail’s concern, one might also find it difficult to see how it does not—even with all the necessary qualifiers concerning the unity between the Son and the Spirit in their work—threaten to re-open the Pelagian door. (Perhaps this is a risk inherent always in the telling of the good news, an action latent with all number of paradoxes to be sure.) Whatever else our faith is, it is a participation in a response already fully made, and which is continually being made, for us in Christ—who is both God’s text to humanity and humanity’s text to God. With the Spirit, the new humanity participates in the incarnate Son’s life, worship and communion with the Father, and in God’s mission to the world. In Jesus Christ, our humanity, and our human response, is “taken up, purified and sanctified, and addressed to God the Father for us as our very own—and that is the word of man with which God is well pleased.”¹³⁴ We can take up our cross and follow Jesus because Jesus has already acted in our place, authored all our decisions and responses to God’s love, even our acts of faith. This was, in Barth’s words, “the making possible of that which seemed to be contrary to every possibility.”¹³⁵

In his *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer draws attention to the fact that Christ is not only the fulfillment of history but also its norm. True moral action, otherwise named ethics, has its “origin,” “essence,” and “goal”¹³⁶

131. Ibid., 109, 110.

132. Ibid., 172.

133. Ibid., 174.

134. Torrance, *Mediation*, 79.

135. Barth, *CD IV/1*, 223.

136. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Bethge, 191.

in the divine economy rather than in some deontological ethic or subjectivism. The concrete form of this economy is “the all-embracing life which is Jesus Christ,” the person who was “willing to become guilty.”¹³⁷ Bonhoeffer continues: “All human responsibility is rooted in the real vicarious representative action of Jesus Christ on behalf of all human beings. Responsible action is vicarious representative action.”¹³⁸ That Jesus Christ really is our life means that when we are called to account (by others or by God) faith can “answer only through the witness of Jesus Christ.”¹³⁹ Faith can only answer for itself in confessing Jesus Christ. And to confess Jesus Christ is to say “Yes”—and to hear God’s “Yes”—to our own humanity and to the authentic human response offered on our behalf.

What I am positing here is that all of Christ—that is, all of grace—does not mean nothing of humanity, but precisely the opposite. To affirm otherwise is to either sever Christ’s humanity from ours or to suggest that true humanity exists apart from that of the Incarnate Son (whom even Kant recognizes as “the prototype of a humanity well-pleasing to God.”¹⁴⁰) We receive our humanity as gift from God mediated through Christ. The relation between divine and human agency is “not something that can be understood logically”¹⁴¹ or causally, a trajectory that has created a competition between divine and human agency in the *ordo salutis*. We are speaking here of an event of such a unique, *sui generis*, character that it remains beyond the simplistic causalist categories. While it may be simpler to employ either *monergistic* (all of God, nothing of humanity) or *synergistic* (partly God, partly humanity) concepts, both are woefully inadequate descriptions of what is happening in the centre and *telos* of the Gospel. “All of Christ” means “all of humanity” is gathered up in Spirit-led action, entering into the “event between God and God,”¹⁴² and called to participate by the same Spirit in the worshipful life of the Son. This means that no human being can repent or flourish apart from the Word made flesh. In Christ alone, and by the Spirit, are persons made

137. See Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Green 228–29 n. 44.

138. *Ibid.*, 232.

139. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Bethge, 192.

140. Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 125.

141. Torrance, *Mediation*, xii.

142. Rossé, *Cry of Jesus*, 138.

fit, and led to share in Christ’s confession and repentance, actions which commit persons to new life shared with the Father in the Spirit.

A final note: one thing that the divergence of accent discussed in this essay illustrates is that even within the family of those who advance “Evangelical Calvinism” there is a vigorous and ongoing conversation regarding interpretation and faithful witness. Such exchanges betray a tradition that is healthy, mature, and robust, and looking for fresh ways to faithfully tell the old, old story of one anointed by the Spirit in our humanity to fulfill ministry on our behalf. Good News indeed.

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Reformation of the Church*

edited by
MYK HABETS
and BOBBY GROW

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