

The God Who Believes

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Faith, Doubt, and the
Vicarious Humanity of Christ

Christian D. Kettler



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*For Ray S. Anderson
teacher, pastor, friend*

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Abbreviations

<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
<i>CD</i>	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i> , edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936–1969
<i>FC</i>	<i>Fathers of the Church</i> , edited by R. J. Deferrari. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press
Calvin, <i>Institutes</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960
<i>LCC</i>	<i>Library of Christian Classics</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1 and 2
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1974

Preface

Faith was easy in those early days. I am a child of “the Jesus Movement,” a crazy, exhilarating, immature, profound time in the early 1970s when many of the “hippie” culture or just non-churched teenagers embraced Jesus Christ. Often more a reflection of the narcissism of the age than a deeply rooted Christianity, its influence was nonetheless significant for many of us. Seven hundred kids meeting in a Presbyterian church fellowship hall (the congregation never grew enough to build a sanctuary) sat on the barren floor for several hours every Saturday night, listening to long sermons and “praising the Lord.” It was exciting to be in the midst of it. Enthusiasm for Bible study, “witnessing,” and even ministry to the poor was kindled by the continual influx of those who “came forward” on Saturday night and became Christians. Faith was not opposed to sight; it was easy to see.

The years go by, of course. Life, growing up, success, failure, disappointment all intervene. Questions arise inevitably; about the Bible, the presence of evil, and even the presence of God in a crazy-quilt world. Doubt is inevitable.

Christian apologetics became attractive, and then out of desperation, necessary for me during my college days. I rightly wanted to possess a faith that was not simply a reflection of the old Sunday School answer to the question, What is faith? Faith, it is said, means believing in something you know ain’t true! No, I rebelled against a Christian credulity and like many sought for certainty and assurance in a logical system of thought as

a way to resolve my emotional insecurity. In looking back, perhaps what I left behind was Christ himself. The infinite patience of my beloved pastor, Bob Myers, continually called us back to the unconditional gospel of God's grace in Christ. For alienated teenagers, alienated by both middle class materialism and counter-culture idealism, this had been a powerful message. Yet a certain kind of apologetics had an enticing draw. An assurance of Jesus' divinity and truth was to be the end result of my quest, but he had ceased to be the substance. I was not really aware that my problem was emotional as well as intellectual. Perhaps I was still desperate for unconditional acceptance, yet seeking a security in my own logic and certainty. The deep needs of the emotions in a young adult were not fed. We may prove Christ to be divine and still be wracked with the doubts that affect the totality of our being including our emotions.

The reading of Karl Barth in college began to chip away at much of my rationalism. The Swiss theologian was exhilarating in scope, passion, audacity, and faith. If God is God, then who are we to demand that he meet up to our criteria? The lyrical, doxological passion of Barth's theology became soothing for my soul. I came to study at Fuller Theological Seminary primarily because his translator, Geoffrey Bromiley, was a professor there. At Fuller, the profound implications of Barth's theology for the integration of theology and ministry were further being explored by Ray Anderson. Anderson became the source for my exposure to his doctoral mentor, and a former student of Barth's, Thomas F. Torrance of the University of Edinburgh. Through a remarkable opportunity to serve as Dr. Torrance's teaching assistant while he was a visiting lecturer at Fuller, my attention was grabbed by his Christology, particularly what he called, "the vicarious humanity of Christ." Torrance's proposal was plain: As common as it has been to consider Christ's *death* to be vicarious, carried out in our place and for us, what if we were to consider that the entirety of his *humanity* was lived vicariously for us and in our place? This spoke powerfully to the inadequacy I felt before God, but probably more strongly, before others.

Several visits with Torrance's brother, James, whose pioneering work investigated the implications of the vicarious humanity of Christ for worship, further intrigued and excited me. The Eucharist is not simply our response to God's love, but our participation in the perfect and faithful response of Jesus Christ, our High Priest (Heb. 8:1). Christ was "the

perfect Eucharistic Being,” in the words of the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann.¹ Christ was eucharistic in that in his genuine humanity he *gave thanks* to the Father (Luke 10:21; Matt 11:25), perfectly responding in faith and obedience to the Father. The Son was thankful to the Father as he “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit,” (Luke 10:21); the very trinitarian life of God. His thanksgiving tugged mightily at my emotional needs. My doctoral studies eventually bore fruit in my book, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation*, and then further studies on the implications of the vicarious humanity of Christ for the ministry of the Church, and the issues of emotional weakness and providence, evil and suffering.²

In recent years my concern has been to take the groundbreaking paradigm of Barth, the Torrances, and Ray Anderson, and especially in terms of the vicarious humanity of Christ, ask: What happens when Christ the Word of God penetrates deeply into our wounded flesh, wounded physically, emotionally, and spiritually? Could not a genuine Christian theology exist that seriously explores the implications of “the Word made flesh” (John 1:14) for the existential cries like despair, guilt and shame, emotional weakness, loneliness, and anxiety, without becoming existentialist? And what are the implications of the vicarious humanity of Christ for the great theological doctrines, such as the doctrine of God? Can this be of help in meeting those cries of the heart?

Such an incarnational theology can welcome the insights of literature in a day in which literary critics seem to abandon literature as a womb for ideas in place of social and political critical reductionism. The reader will

¹ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 38.

² Christian D. Kettler, *The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1991); “The Atonement as the Life of God in the Ministry of the Church” in Christian D. Kettler and Todd H. Speidell, eds., *Incarnational Ministry: The Presence of Christ in Church, Society, and Family: Essays in Honor of Ray S. Anderson* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1990), 58–78; “‘For I Do Not Do the Good I Want . . . and I’m Tired of Trying’: Weakness and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ” in Todd H. Speidell, ed., *On Being Christian . . . and Human: Essays in Celebration of Ray S. Anderson* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 51–69; and “He Takes Back the Ticket . . . for Us: Providence, Evil, Suffering, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ,” *Journal of Christian Theological Research* 8 (2003), 35–55.

³ Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000).

readily note my indebtedness particularly to Wendell Berry's contemporary classic novel, *Jayber Crow*.³ Berry is not afraid to follow Dostoevsky and all great writers in seriously wrestling with ideas in the context of human experience. *Jayber* and other such literature create a matrix for an incarnational theology to be further enfleshed and tested out in genuine human cries. As Anderson reveals so pointedly, "Unrealized hope cannot be healed by words that do not touch the pain and emptiness we all feel to some degree."⁴

Here is what this book is about: the relationship of the humanity of Christ to our doubt and how that humanity includes a genuine faith that should be the basis for our faith. We are not left, as James Torrance cautions us, to be thrown back upon ourselves.⁵ Can we say that *Jesus believes*, not just as an example of a believer, but *believes for me and in my place, vicariously*, so that I can be helped in my unbelief (Mark 9:24)? Can we say, "*Jesus believes . . . help me with my unbelief*"? Does Jesus believe even when it is difficult, if not impossible, for me to believe?

When we do take the faith of Jesus seriously, it is often only in terms of imitating his faith. There is certainly a strong biblical tradition for the *imitatio Christi*: "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master," Jesus teaches, "it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master" (Matt 10:24). Paul boldly instructs his churches, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). In the history of Christian spirituality much is made of imitating Christ by such influential figures as Francis of Assisi and Thomas à Kempis.

However, the imitation of Christ is not the whole story of the Christian life. Paul speaks decisively of the Christian life as an *imitatio* of Christ in Phil 2:5-11: In the midst dissensions in Philippi (4:2; 2:2), Paul calls upon the church to "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," a mind of emptying oneself for the sake of others (2:5-11). But what appears to be a call simply to ask "What would Jesus do?" is based more on his rich understanding of the Christian life as being "in Christ" (Eph 1:1; Phil 2:21; 2 Cor 5:17). Paul prefaces his exhortation to be of the same mind by saying, "If there is any encouragement in Christ, any

⁴ Ray S. Anderson and Dennis Guernsey, *On Being Family: A Social Theology of the Family* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 128.

⁵ James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 44.

consolation from love, any sharing (*koinovia*) in the Spirit . . .” Sharing in the Spirit is the reality of participating in the continuing life of Christ. Imitation of Christ is imperative, yet apart from our sharing in the Spirit, our participation in Christ, imitation can end in so much frustration, what James Torrance means by being thrown back upon ourselves. Participation before imitation speaks of the fellowship and communion (cf. the Eucharist) with Christ through the Spirit that is organic to being Christian. *Koinovia* is a relational term, reflecting the communion between the Father and the Son through the Spirit. The Trinity is closely at hand here. Partaking of the cup and the bread of the Lord’s Supper is often called “communion” because it is a continuing fellowship with the Lord, a participation in his life. We are called to imitate Christ because we participate in his life. This life, we suggest, includes his life of faith, indeed, the entirety of his humanity is lived vicariously for us and in our place.

We will proceed in this way: Chapter one explores the challenge of doubt as both intellectual and emotional issues in terms of implications for faith and the knowledge of *God*, vocation and the knowledge of *oneself*, evil and suffering and the knowledge of *the world*, and pluralism and postmodernism as the knowledge of *the culture*. Doubt as a problem is all pervasive, we will argue, and therefore needs a response that addresses the totality of our humanity. We conclude chapter one with an addendum, presenting the biblical basis for the vicarious humanity of Christ as found in the Gospels, and its implications for the above-mentioned challenges. Chapter two faces the controversy of the value of doubt. Chapters three and four then explore the implications of the vicarious humanity of Christ for *how* Christians know God as well as *who* the God is whom Christians know. What are the implications of the vicarious humanity of Christ for theological epistemology and the doctrine of God? What will this mean for how we deal with doubt? Chapter five takes the doctrine of God one step further in terms of the question of the providence of God in a world of evil and suffering. We end in chapter six with a look at the doubting self today: What does Christ’s faith mean to one whose faith falters today and in the future?

An earlier form of chapter five was published in the *Journal of Christian Theological Research* 3, 2003, under the title, “He Takes Back the Ticket . . . for Us: Providence, Evil, Suffering, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ.”

Several good and judicious friends have contributed to sharpen the form and engage the ideas of this book. I would like to thank Dale Allison, Ray Anderson, Judy Boudreaux, Christie Breault, Warren Farha, Bill Glennen, Charles Hughes, Gordon Houser, Jennifer Jantz, Robin Langhart, Deborah Seely, Rusty Smoker, Todd Speidell, Claire Vanderpool, and Mark Wells for their help.

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Faith may not be easier these days, but maybe more interesting.

1

Doubt and the Vicarious Faith of Christ

“Seven days,” said Faramir, “But think not ill of me, if I say to you: they have brought me both a joy and a pain that I never thought to know. Joy to see you; but pain, because now the fear and doubt of this evil time are grown dark indeed. Éowyn, I would not have this world end now, or lose so soon what I have found.”

Faramir to Éowyn, J. R. R. Tolkien,
*The Return of the King: The Lord of the Rings part three*¹

God have mercy on the man
who doubts what he's sure of.

Bruce Springsteen, “Brilliant Disguise”

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King: The Lord of the Rings part three* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), 240.

The Dilemmas of Doubt

The pain would be unbearable if the joy were not indescribable. Doubt is a problem of living with two realities: unbelief and belief, or pain and joy. Doubt is a problem, but it is not just an intellectual problem. It is an agony of the soul, of our very being. Pain is bad enough, yet it is truly pain because of the joy in life, the indescribable joy.

“Upon my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves” cries the woman in the Song of Solomon. “I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer” (3:1).² The joy of love gives birth to the pain of longing, C.S. Lewis’s understanding of joy as longing.³ The young Lewis treasured joy as a sense of the longing evoked when summer gives way to autumn, or a longing for other worlds, worlds of imagination such as in the Norse legends, science fiction and fantasy tales, preparing one for the reality of heaven, a world without pain and death. The lover may be longing for the missing loved one. What lover has not doubted at times the love of the beloved?

Doubt is not just a question of God’s existence. Doubt tears at the fabric of our being when we live between pain and joy. There is no problem of pain without joy. The young poet’s first encounter with nature in Jane Kenyon’s poem, “In the Grove: The Poet at Ten,” juxtaposes joy and pain: “Nothing could rouse her then/ from that joy so violent/ it was hard to distinguish from pain.”⁴ Joy is usually conceived to be benign and effervescent. Genuine joy is made of sterner stuff. Genuine joy has even a

² Cf. Origen, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* I, 7, in Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from the Patristic Era with Commentary*, trans. Theodore Berkeley and Jeremy Hummerstone (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City, 1993), 189: “Then she [the Bride in the Song of Songs] looks longingly for the Bridegroom who has shown himself and then disappeared. This happens often throughout the Song of Songs and can be understood by anyone who has experienced it himself . . . This happens often until I hold him truly and arise, leaning on my beloved.”

³ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955). See also Chris Kettler, “Joy and Logic in a Glad Embrace: The Theology of Narnia,” in *C.S. Lewis’s The Chronicles of Narnia: A Study Guide and Workbook for Groups and Individuals*, ed. Frank Kastor (Wichita, Ks.: St. Mark’s Press, 1998), 93–101; Corbin Scott Carnell, *Bright Shadow of Reality: C.S. Lewis and the Feeling Intellect* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

⁴ Jane Kenyon, *Otherwise: New and Selected Poems* (St. Paul, Minn.: Graywolf, 1996), 3.

“violence,” like the kingdom of heaven “suffers violence,” perhaps by the contrary passions it engenders (Matt 11:12). Genuine joy, the indescribable joy, therefore, can live with the unbearable pain. So also the disciples, in a wonderfully poignant way, “disbelieved for joy” when they were confronted by the risen Lord and nonetheless possessed doubts (Luke 24:41, RSV). The joy was too wonderful to be believed. The disciples shared the great longing of the ancient Jews for the coming of the Messiah. Like the lover daring the risk of love, the fear of disappointment was formidable.

The fear of disappointment may be fueled by our lack of appreciation for grace. Jane Kenyon, in her poem, “Happiness,” challenges our common view that happiness is to be pursued, even demanded and coerced. No, happiness is that which “finds you asleep midafternoon as you so often are during the unmerciful hours of your despair.”⁵ Happiness is grace. Grace pursues us, finds us by surprise in the friends, loved ones, nature, and art that God gives us, not because we can demand or coerce it. These gifts are ordinary, not idealized or spectacular, but may come “to the monk in his cell,” “to the woman sweeping the street with a birch broom, to the child whose mother has passed out from drink,” and “to the clerk stacking cans of carrots in the night.”

Yet such happiness is couched with “the unmerciful hours of your despair,” “disbelieving for joy” in the midst of doubt. The late night customer in a convenience store demands cash from the register, and not being pleased with \$86.75, permanently interrupts the clerk’s happiness with a revolver. What kind of society do we live in that tolerates such a crime? Here is doubt about *the culture*. What kind of world is this? Here is doubt about *the world*. What does my life mean if it can be so cruelly and suddenly terminated? Here is doubt about *ourselves*. Why would a loving and all-powerful God allow such evil in the world? Here is the most wrenching doubt: doubt about *God*.

The Problem of the Jesus of History and Culture

We have been suggesting the hope of a christological approach to doubt. Yet such an answer might create more problems than it solves.

⁵ Kenyon, *Otherwise*, 3.

No person is less known in the history of the world than Jesus Christ. No person is better known in the history of the world than Jesus Christ. How can these two statements both be true? But they are. World events, whether they involve political coups, elections, natural catastrophes, or epidemics, blithely go on their way regardless of whether or not Jesus Christ lives or lived. Popular culture is filled with music videos, films, and television, all content to ignore Jesus of Nazareth. Apart from the occasional historical television program, there seems to be a conspiracy of silence. Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, was such a sensation in part because it was an anomaly: a film that sought to portray the Jesus of the Gospels honestly and sincerely. The vast majority of contemporary movies ignore religion or portray it as an oppressive, reactionary relic of an unenlightened former age. Jesus Christ, the Jesus of the four Gospels, is blatantly, yet quietly, ignored.

But is Christ also *too* well known in the contemporary world? Walker Percy's fictional character Sutter Vaught bemoans the fact of how well known Christ is. He has, moreover, become particularly offensive because of "the company he keeps," e.g., the narrow-minded, bigoted, anti-intellectual, and anti-cultural fundamentalist.

Christ should leave us. He is too much with us and I don't
like his friends. We have no hope of recovering Christ until
Christ leaves us. There is after all something worse than being
God-forsaken. It is when God overstays his welcome and takes
up with the wrong people.⁶

Malachi Martin's picture of how we make Jesus in our own image is helpful, comical, tragic, and depressing: whether it is "Jesus Caesar," "Jesus Monk," "Jesus Pentecostalist," "Jesus Goodfellow," or the epitome of Protestant individualism, "Jesus Take-My-Marbles-and-Etc."⁷ This is too much Jesus! So much so that one becomes jaded and cynical about any genuine knowledge of the man from Nazareth. The recent attempts by some radical biblical scholars to uncover the "real" Jesus seem simply to reveal just more confusion about the man from Nazareth: Was Jesus "the

⁶ Walker Percy, *The Last Gentleman* (New York: Ivy, 1986), 293.

⁷ Malachi Martin, *Jesus Now* (New York: Dutton, 1973).

itinerant sage,” “the Hellenistic cynic,” “the apocalyptic prophet,” “the inspired rabbi,” or the “classic Jesus” of the creeds?⁸ Is “Jesus” really just a cipher for whatever our greatest values are, as Feuerbach argues in his description of religion?⁹

The Promise of the Vicarious Humanity of Christ

Into this contemporary confusion, the Scottish theologian T. F. Torrance suggests an understanding of Jesus not separate from the four Gospels but including a perspective not often emphasized, which he calls “the vicarious humanity of Christ.”¹⁰ In an older theology, it was common to speak of the vicarious *death* of Christ, in the sense that Christ died in our place, was our substitute, on the cross. While not meaning to dilute the importance of the death of Christ, Torrance urges that the vicarious death

⁸ “Who Was Jesus?,” *Time* (August 15, 1988), 37–42; David Van Biena, “The Gospel Truth,” *Time* (April 8, 1996), 52–59. See also the state of scholarly discussion of Jesus in *Theology Today* (entire issue on the historical Jesus) (April, 1995); John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); and the critique of the above in Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998); Robert J. Miller, ed., *The Apocalyptic Jesus: A Debate* (Santa Rosa, Ca.: Polebridge Press, 2001); and Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes, eds., *Jesus Then & Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 2001).

⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 12ff.

¹⁰ The most important writings on the vicarious humanity of Christ are found in T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992); “The Word of God and the Response of Man” in *God and Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 133–164; James B. Torrance, “The Vicarious Humanity of Christ” in T. F. Torrance, ed., *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), 127–147; James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*; and Thomas F. Torrance, James B. Torrance, and David W. Torrance, *A Passion for Christ: The Vision That Ignites Ministry* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1999). Elmer M. Colyer provides a helpful survey of the vicarious humanity of Christ in Torrance’s thought in *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), 97–126. Alister E. McGrath ably reviews the whole of Torrance’s thought in the context of his life in *T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999).

must be seen in terms of the wider context of both the entire humanity of Christ and our entire humanity. His humanity involves a vicarious act. The nature of Christ's vicarious work is not simply one moment on the cross, but his entire life, so that the entirety of our lives might be affected. The Word took on the entirety of humanity, body and soul, in order to save the entire human (Athanasius).¹¹

"Vicarious" may be a strange and outmoded word, but I am unable to come up with a better alternative. Let me then carefully define what "vicarious" means in terms of the vicarious humanity of Christ. Unfortunately, it can often mean to some people "pseudo" or "false," as in a father getting a "vicarious" thrill from his son's accomplishments as an athlete. The son experiences the authentic thrill from his athletic accomplishment. The father's thrill is not based on any accomplishment of his own. In that way it is "false," not real. But Torrance's meaning of "vicarious" is not of that sort. The vicarious humanity of Christ does not mean that Christ's humanity is unreal. Quite the contrary! It does mean that the vicarious humanity of Christ speaks of the deep interaction between Christ's humanity and our humanity at the level of our *being*, the *ontological* level. So the atoning work of Christ is neither simply a means by which we are declared righteous by God, nor simply a demonstration of God's love. It is both, but much more, in the sense of God desiring to recreate our humanity at the deepest levels, addressing our needs and fears, our doubts from within our very being.

A *vicarious* sense of Christ's humanity signifies that Jesus Christ is both the *representative* of and *substitute* for my humanity.¹² He represents my humanity before God the Father, having taken my humanity upon himself, bringing it back to God from the depths of sin and death. He is the High Priest, representing the people before God (The Epistle to the Hebrews). But he is also the sacrifice himself. He is the substitute, doing in my place, in my stead, what I am unable to do: live a life of perfect faithfulness to, obedience to, and trust in God. "Vicarious" at its heart means doing something for another in their stead, doing something that they are unable to do. Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls this *Stellvertretung*, recently

¹¹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 15, NPNF, second series, 44. See also T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 150.

¹² T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 116.

translated as “vicarious representative action” and earlier as “deputyship.”¹³ Deputies in the old western movies were appointed by the sheriff to represent him and to do what he was unable to do by his lonesome: form a posse and apprehend the bad guy. So also, Bonhoeffer argues, we act as a deputy whenever we act on behalf of someone else, whether it is as a teacher for a student or a parent for a child. A young child is unable to tie his shoelaces. The parent has to intervene and do it for him. (The parent, however, should not tie the child’s shoelaces for the rest of his life! This is the importance of the question, If Christ has believed for us, do we have to believe? We will have to address this throughout our discussion.) Notice the emphasis here on *need* and *inability*. We have already noted the question of our inability to believe in terms of doubt. Here is where the vicarious humanity of Christ yields rich theological and spiritual dividends.

Certainty has been the crucial issue for me. How can I know for certain that Christianity is true? How do I know that I am not a Christian simply because it is convenient or that it gives me friends, or worse yet, (for a college professor and an ordained minister) provides an income? Again, I keep coming back to the center of the faith: Who Jesus Christ is, Christology. How does our Christology affect our deepest crises: despair, guilt, shame, loneliness, anxiety, and doubt? In the Gospels, the risen Christ is the real manifestation of God that becomes the only check upon the disciples’ doubt, so that Jesus can exhort them, “Do not doubt, but believe” (John 20:27) and Thomas can respond appropriately, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).¹⁴ “O strange wonder, unbelief hath given birth unto steadfast faith!”¹⁵ If there is certainty it is not apart from Jesus Christ.

Hearing the Cry of the Heart

The existential lostness of humanity does not seem to reflect, however, the glory of Christ. The incapacity of humanity is made manifest by the

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 257–60.

¹⁴ Barth, *CD*, III/2, 449.

¹⁵ Sunday of Thomas, *The Pentecostarion* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1990), 68.

cry of the heart, like a child crying for one's mother in utter need.¹⁶ Pascal speaks of becoming "terrified" by "the blindness and wretchedness of man," "the whole silent universe," and "man without light."¹⁷ Why should Christianity join the choruses of deceit that optimistically sing the praises of technophilic humanity? All of our pretensions of technological and scientific knowledge often mask the dire straits we live in. To such an extent they become comical. Walker Percy wryly expresses this:

Why is it possible to learn more in ten minutes about the Crab Nebula in Taurus, which is 6,000 light-years away, than you presently know about yourself, even though you've been stuck with yourself all of your life?¹⁸

The myriad of human experience cries for solace. The glory of human reason, with all of its accomplishments, often seems to pale compared with what we truly value in life: a loved one's smile, a friend's embrace, a Kansas sunset, the sweetness and awe of worship, or the ecstasy of intellectual insight. Those values can be smothered and even crushed by cruel twists of fate and unrealized hopes in life. How often does Christian teaching really speak to these depths? "Who will teach a child born with a twisted body that life is a gift to be accepted and valued?" Ray Anderson asks.¹⁹ Still, the wonder of life's goodness and the sheer contingency of the universe cry silently for some kind of explanation, proclamation, announcement (at least a press release!) of meaning.²⁰ Death, most of all, mocks our pretenses of immortality, revealing the transitory nature of our humanness. The very existence of God in such a vacuum is questioned.²¹

¹⁶ Pseudo-Macarius, *Forty-Sixth Homily*, cited in Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 183.

¹⁷ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: Dutton, 1958). See also Daniel Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian and the Risk of Commitment* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 10.

¹⁸ Walker Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York: Washington Square, 1983), 7.

¹⁹ Ray S. Anderson, "Spirituality is a Domestic Skill," in Ray S. Anderson and Dennis B. Guernsey, *On Being Family: A Social Theology of the Family* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 128.

²⁰ T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 58. See also Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 204.

²¹ Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 92.