

**Incarnation and Resurrection:
Interviews With Robert T. Walker**

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Introduction

This is a transcript of three interviews conducted as part of the *You're Included* series, sponsored by Grace Communion International. We have more than 100 interviews available. You may watch them or download video or audio at www.gci.org/YI.

In normal conversation, thoughts are not always put into well-formed sentences, and sometimes thoughts are not completed. In the following transcripts, we have removed words that did not seem to contribute any meaning to the sentence. In some cases we could not figure out what word was intended. We apologize for any transcription errors, and if you notice any, we welcome your assistance.

Grace Communion International is in broad agreement with the theology of the people we interview, but GCI does not necessarily endorse every detail of every interview. The opinions expressed are those of the interviewees. We thank them for their time and their willingness to participate.

We incur substantial production costs for these interviews and transcripts. Donations in support of this ministry may be made at www.gci.org/donate.

Our guest in the following five interviews is Robert T. Walker, nephew of Thomas and James Torrance. He has degrees in philosophy and theology from Edinburgh University, Scotland. Walker gained an intimate understanding of Torrance's theology, studying under him and hearing these lectures in person. He divides his time between teaching theology at Edinburgh University and teaching outdoor pursuits in Perthshire.

The interviews were conducted by J. Michael Feazell. Mike Feazell received his D.Min. from Azusa Pacific University in 2000. At the time of the interviews, he was vice-president of Grace Communion International; he now teaches part-time at Grace Communion Seminary.

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Christ Has Faith for Us

Introduction: *You're Included* traveled to Scotland's esteemed University of St. Andrews for a special Thomas F. Torrance conference marking the launch of the book *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*. This is the second of two volumes consisting of Torrance's lectures on Christology at New College in Edinburgh, Scotland from 1952 to 1978. Edited by retired theology lecturer Robert T. Walker, the two books have been called clear, accessible, deeply rooted in Scripture, and the most comprehensive presentation of Torrance's understanding of the incarnation and the atonement ever published. As a nephew of the late Thomas F. Torrance, Walker gained an intimate understanding of Torrance's theology, studying under him and hearing his lectures in person.

In the 500-year-old senior common room of St. Mary's College, St. Andrews' renowned divinity school, J. Michael Feazell, [then] Vice-President of Grace Communion International, interviews Robert T. Walker.

JMF: You're editor of two very important books by Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement* and *Incarnation*. They're having a great impact, and we'd like to talk to you about the project, how it came to be, how it developed, and you're the person to talk to.

RW: I got a phone call from a classmate that I shared a room with at New College when we heard these lectures, and he asked me if I would be willing to edit the lectures. He had persuaded Thomas Torrance to get them published, and Thomas Torrance had given him the manuscript, or his son had, with a note saying that these needed an awful lot of work before they could be published. And Jock thought I was the best person to do it, so I said yes. But I had no idea how much work was involved in doing it.

JMF: You started in what year?

RW: 2003 or something. Thomas Torrance, my uncle, was almost 90 by that stage, and his short-term memory was failing a bit... he also had a stroke and so he couldn't have done the job.

JMF: So it involved collecting the notes from the class...

RW: No, because by the end of his career, he read all of his lectures from a typescript. He'd often stop and speak off the cuff, and those were often the best parts. But the lectures or such were all typed out and duplicated for us. Later they were photocopied. Somebody put them onto

computer disk, so I got hard copies and the computer disks to work with.

JMF: It wasn't long before you realized that you'd need two volumes.

RW: That's right. When I looked at all the material, and what wasn't there that I knew he'd given us handouts on, and there was a missing lecture that I remember hearing, a whole chapter, I realized pretty soon we needed to have two volumes.

JMF: How many people were involved in helping you with the project?

RW: Mostly myself. Jock Stein, the editor of Handsel Press, who had initiated the project, was a great help. On any points of difficulty, just to check that I'd interpreted it right, I checked with Tom's brother, David. So it was mostly myself.

JMF: As you went through and put together this material in a form that would be a book, you began to see that the lectures as they were prepared and presented are a little more accessible, easier to read for the average person, than Thomas Torrance's earlier academic work, his published work.

RW: Yes. They're lectures, so they're the spoken word, and they come across better, they're more alive. When he writes, it becomes a little more polished. He writes extremely well, but it comes across differently. These lectures are easily the most accessible way into his thought.

JMF: They're also very thorough. As I recall, you mentioned that they're covering pretty much the entire range of his theological thought.

RW: They cover the doctrine of Christ, the incarnation of God becoming human, the Old Testament background, the whole life of Christ, the atonement, justification, reconciliation, redemption, resurrection, ascension, coming again, doctrine of the church. Yeah, they're pretty full.

JMF: You also put together a synopsis at the beginning that goes through everything that you're going to see as a reader as you go through the book. You can get an overview from the beginning.

RW: Right. The synopsis is all the headings lifted out of the book and put together at the beginning. That gives a good guide to the contents in addition to the index.

JMF: I found it easy to find a topic that I wanted to read about. It's easy using that synopsis or the index or together. It's easy to locate a particular area of interest. You also included a glossary of terms. It's user-friendly, both of them. What kind of feedback have you received from those who have been reading it?

RW: Everyone says that they're very readable, and they've been surprised because Thomas Torrance has a reputation of being difficult at times. I heard these lectures. They were unbelievably thrilling and stretching —most exciting thing I've ever heard in my life, and ever will, because we heard the lectures every day but Wednesday, when there were no lectures. The content was deeply moving, inspiring, and thrilling. I was keen to make them as reader-friendly as I could in breaking up some of the longer sentences, adding lots of headings, explaining the meaning of terms that the students of the day didn't have to have explained, but the early reader does, and making it reader-friendly.

JMF: In talking about how exciting and thrilling the lectures were, what is it about Torrance's theology and his approach to these fundamental issues of the gospel and of Christian theology that make it so thrilling and exciting, so fresh, so worth reading?

RW: It's deeply biblical. He was brought up to read the Bible three chapters a day and five on Sundays. He continued to do that all the way through his life. He read it two or three times each year. He is steeped in the Bible. That, plus he has this Christo-centric view. He interprets it in the light of his goal in Christ, and Christ as the atonement of sin and the heart of the Trinity. With that focus, he's able to connect Christian doctrine to biblical passages. So you suddenly see some connections and new meanings in the Bible, and then it brings alive the Christian faith.

I felt, why aren't we taught this in the churches? That's the reaction I get when I teach it to a student. They say, "Why didn't we get this in church? Because we should." This is what they got at the Reformation, under Luther or Calvin. I find it hugely stimulating, enriching, and exciting.

JMF: What are some of the areas that we don't get typically in church? A person would say Christ is the center of the Bible and he ties everything together, but what are they missing, that this theology is bringing out of the Scriptures?

RW: I could answer that for several hours, but for example, the way in which the importance of the person of Christ, who he is, that he is God, fully God, and yet fully man. We don't make enough of his being fully man, and not just that, but that he is the union of God and man in his own person. He's one reality. There's not a God Jesus and a man Jesus. There's one Jesus. In his person, he is the union of God and man.

Because that union that was forged and made at Bethlehem is unbreakable, humanity and God will never be separated — they're one in Christ. That's the heart of the Christian faith and our salvation. We are joined to Christ because he shares our humanity. Christ is God, he's joined

to God. Because of that union, that's the heart of our salvation. That's the ultimate meaning of all the great "I am's" of John's Gospel. That's one aspect of a deeper biblical emphasis that we don't get.

JMF: Most Christians seem to think Jesus came, was a human being, and died for our sins. Then, when he was raised, he goes back to being God. We don't typically think of him as still being a human, fully God, fully man. We think of him as fully God again, but what is the significance of him being fully human? Why does that matter to me and my Christian faith and my walk with Christ?

RW: It matters hugely, and it's common to think that he's no longer a man. But if he's only God, then we're here on earth, he's up in heaven, and there's a distance. Whereas if he's still man, if he's still bearing our humanity, then he's the one who prays for us and knows what we feel like. He takes our prayers, our human prayers, and presents them to the Father. Because he shares our humanity, that's an unbroken link with him.

JMF: You said he takes our prayers and presents them to the Father. So would that mean that we don't need to worry about whether our prayers are good enough?

RW: Right. We pray, and we're called to pray, but our prayers are never what they ought to be. He is the one who has taken our fallen humanity and perfected it. He takes our prayers and makes them his, and presents them to the Father. That's the emphasis of the letter to the Hebrews, that he is our High Priest. Paul also says that if we've been saved by his death, how much more will we be saved by his life? That is very significant. You're saying if we've been saved by his death, how much more will we be saved by his risen life in heaven. Christian life is sharing in Christ's risen life. If Christ is not risen as man, then we don't have that risen life to share in.

JMF: What does it mean to share in his life? Usually we think of that as "We need to follow his example. We need to obey as well as he did, and that's sharing in his life." That doesn't sound like what you're talking about.

RW: It's a lot more than that; that he has become man in our place for us, to act as man for us. In his human life, he's fulfilled everything that we ought to be doing. It's not a matter of trying to copy it, it's the fact that he has already done it for us and it's ours, so that his human life, his response to God, is our response.

That comes out strongly in Galatians 2:20, "I've been crucified with Christ. I live, yet not I

but Christ who lives in me. And the life I live in the flesh I live by *the faith of the Son of God* who loved me and gave himself for me.” Properly understood, this faith is not our faith in Christ, and it’s not our faith that saves us. It’s *Christ’s* faith that saved us; it’s his humanity. We put faith in his faith or in his human life, in his human righteousness. That’s the content of our salvation. We don’t rely on what we do — we live out of his fullness, his prayer, his life. We live in union with him.

JMF: So the passages that speak of “We’re already seated with him in heavenly places, we’re already seated at the right hand of the Father with him, we already have passed into eternal life,” we can take them seriously.

RW: Absolutely.

JMF: So our acts of obedience, although they don’t merit salvation for us, are our participation in the righteous... Like the prayer you mentioned (he takes our prayer and makes it his own, so that it is effective), he takes everything we are and do in the same way, then.

RW: Yes. We are called to live out the life that he has lived for us. The only reason we can live it out is because he has already done it for us.

JMF: We’re living out something that’s already so.

RW: Yes. We’re living out the salvation that he has won for us.

JMF: It’s not a matter of going around worrying all the time whether we’ll make it, let’s say, into heaven or that we’ll measure up in some way.

RW: No. The gospel is the incredible realization that Jesus is not only God coming to rescue us, but he’s also God coming to be man for us, even to make our response for us. When we make a response, I’m not making an extra response to God in addition to what Christ has made for us — I’m letting Christ’s response to his Father be mine. I’m resting on his faith. We need to have faith, but it’s not faith in *our* faith — it’s resting on Christ and his human righteousness and his faith.

JMF: So we trust in him, not in ideas... Like you said, we don’t have faith in our faith. Often, our faith is weak, but we don’t have to worry when our faith is weak — we can trust that he has perfect faith for us.

RW: That’s right.

JMF: So we’re trusting in him completely. Someone might argue, yes, but if you believe that, then there’s nothing to keep you from behaving badly, from being disobedient, since you

would say, “I’m already taken care of in Christ, so therefore I can live in whatever destructive way I want and I’m still safe in Christ.” How do we respond to that?

RW: That’s a key question. Paul answered it at the beginning of Romans 6. In chapter 5, Paul said we are saved. It’s been done. At the start of chapter 6 he says, “Does that mean we can sin? We’ve been saved.” He says *no*, because for one thing, if we sin, we’re bringing ourselves back again under the slavery of sin. But secondly, if we have been saved, we have been made *new*. If we sin, we’re saying we haven’t been made new, but we’re acting a lie against what Christ has done for us and we’re falling back into sin.

The fact that we’ve been saved doesn’t mean we don’t do anything; it’s the opposite. It liberates us to live out the life that’s given to us in Christ. We often think (this is the way Tom Torrance used to put it), some of God, some of man. He does his part, we now have to do our part. He always emphasized it’s not like that. The way it works is: all of God means all of man. The fact that God has done it all, his part and our part, that liberates us to become ourselves in him and to live to the full out of him, because we’re not worried about our having to do it. We’re living out of Christ.

JMF: How do we deal with the fact that we still sin? Even though we are in Christ, we fall short. How do we cope with that?

RW: We’ll continue to sin until the day we die. But it’s not what *we* do that counts, it’s what we are in Christ. We are in the process of being cleansed, slowly. We never reach perfection. In fact, often the more we know Christ, the more we know our sin.

JMF: It does seem like that.

RW: At the same time, we trust more in him. It’s not a matter of living out of ourselves and the concern with how good we are or how good Christians we are, it’s a matter of living out of Christ, with Christ and out of him.

JMF: That brings to mind the passage in Hebrews 4, “Since we have such a great high priest, therefore we go to the throne of grace to find help in time of need.” It seems to be saying, like you said, because he’s already done everything for us and made us who we are in him, that when we fall short, that grace drives us to the throne of grace to find the help we need. That takes away all the fear, anxiety and worry about salvation, doesn’t it?

RW: Yes, it liberates us.

JMF: It almost sounds too easy. It sounds too simple. It sounds like good news, but it’s so

good that it can't possibly be so.

RW: (laughing). That's right. When somebody hears the gospel for the first time... I love Martin Luther's phrase. He said it's like a cow staring at a new gate. This can't be true — is it? That is the impact of the gospel when we first see it. We're liberated. You are freed from thinking, "I've got to do this." Christ has done it for us. When we understand that, that is the beginning of faith.

JMF: That would drive you toward sin?

RW: No.

JMF: That would drive you toward joy, and toward the faith that you have to live it out.

RW: Yes. Torrance used to use the analogy that when his daughter was young, he would walk with his daughter. She held him tightly, but his hand was around hers. She'd often stumble. What mattered was not her feeble grasp of him, but his grasp of her. That's the same as Christ. It's not our grasp of Christ that counts, it's his grasp of us.

JMF: Yes. That raises the question of confession. We're told to confess our sins, and yet we're already forgiven and our sins are taken care of. What role does confession play in the process?

RW: On the cross Christ took all our sins and nailed them to the cross. There are numerous verses that speak about, "If when we were enemies we were reconciled by the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we are saved by his life." The passages indicate it's been done. We've been saved.

We do need to confess our sins. That's partly for our sake, that in the process of confessing, we don't bottle them up. We bring them to the surface in the light of what Christ has done for us. Our confessing them is part of the means by which what has been done already for us in Christ is actualized in our lives. We come to know the power of sins forgiven, if we can put it like that. He has already put away our sins, and yet we still live as though we have them. But by confessing them we bring them to the cross so that their having been put away on the cross is verified to us.

JMF: So we're taking part in the thing that's already so. We're participating in the reality of the forgiveness we already have. That changes the way we approach confession. In my life, early on, I had the idea that God might not forgive me, so I would have to ask more than once and I would keep doing it with more and more fervency and intensity until I could feel that maybe I

was convincing myself of the reality of it... It was as though I was asking, or let me say begging, a boss for a raise or something. It was like begging that God would forgive me until I felt like he had. Even then, I wasn't sure that he did. Why would he forgive me anyway, because this is probably the 100th time I've asked about the same thing.

RW: Yep.

JMF: So that changes the whole... we can confess our sins knowing we're forgiven. It's almost a joyful thing.

RW: It should be joyful repentance. We don't repent *in order to* be forgiven. It's forgiveness that leads us to repentance and to joyful repentance. That's a proper way to understand it.

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Why the Incarnation Is Good News

J. Michael Fezell: What is a Christian missing out on if they don't have an incarnational understanding of the gospel?

Robert Walker: The first thing they're missing out on is that they do not know that God has come all the way to us where we are, because incarnation says that God has become man. In other words, he's no longer distant. He's come in person, into space and time, to do our salvation, to meet us face to face in Jesus. If we don't have a proper understanding of the incarnation, that God became man, then we don't know that God is really with us. But also, we don't know that he's become man *to save us*. The fact that he's become man means that he has come all the way to what we are and achieved our salvation for us as man. So on two counts, we're not aware of how much God has united himself to us.

JMF: A lot of Christians think of Jesus as a role model — he came to show the way. We have popular songs, “He Came to Earth to Show the Way,” for example. What's wrong with just seeing him as a role model?

RW: If we think he's come to show us the way, that implies that “the way” is different from what *he* is. In that view, he would say, “that's the way, walk in it,” and he shows us. But he's much more than that — he *IS* the way. In John's Gospel he says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” What he's done *is* the way. He is the way and so there's much more than just *showing* us the way. He has done everything for us, and we come to the Father through him. So he is the way who has done it for us.

JMF: That would still fit with the role model, if we think of it in terms of following him — if he's the way, then do we follow him and just try to do what he did?

RW: In a way. But it's more than that, because he has done it for us. We can't comprehend it in the sense of trying to do what he did, because of our sin. The Christian life is living in unity with him, and so, living out of what he has done for us. Rather than trying to copy what he has done so that it's *our* doing it, he's become man to do it *for* us, so we make what he's done ours, and we live out of it. We do the same thing but not in our strength trying to do it all over again. Through union with him, because of the Spirit living in us, we find ourselves beginning to live the way he lived.

JMF: We talk of the Spirit and doing it in the Spirit, but we can't see the Spirit. So how do we know that the Spirit is at work in us?

RW: We're familiar with light. When you go into a room and it's dark, and you flip a switch and the light comes on. We actually can't see light, but we can see what light lights up. And it's the Spirit that gives us the eyes to see Christ and makes Christ real for us, so that if we know Christ, then we know it's through the Spirit. The Spirit is the One who opens us up to live out of Christ.

JMF: You say that he's already done it for us. If that's so, then what are we trying to do? If he's already done everything necessary for our salvation, what is left for us to do for ourselves?

RW: In one sense, nothing, but in another sense, everything. It's to joyfully live out the life that he has re-made for us. If we think of it in the sense that he has come and taken our fallen, dying humanity that wastes away and gets older and dies and then disintegrates in the grave...he's taken our life, he's remade it in his own life. That's what the resurrection is about — that's the remaking of our life. He gives us our new humanity. We're living out our new humanity that he gives us. We're not trying to copy him. We couldn't — we couldn't rise from the dead.

JMF: That's the trouble, isn't it? We try to do what Jesus says, but we fall short, and we may be successful to some degree, but we fall short and then we feel guilty, anxious and fearful about how can we be part of the kingdom of God? How can we be saved, because we fall short and because we're not following Christ as we should? We're fearful. But incarnational theology, seeing the gospel in the way you're describing, doesn't push us back on how well we perform, it sounds like you're saying.

RW: It points us to Christ, and so that we see his humanity, the life that he lived as our life. We don't see that he's done something and we have to copy it — we see what he's done; that is our life. He was born for us, his birth at Bethlehem is our new birth. When he died, that was our death. When he rose, that was our resurrection. When he ascended into heaven, he took us with him.

This is what Paul says — and that's the meaning of faith — that we understand that he so came into our place to live for us, that everything that he did is ours. We live out of that. That takes away all the strain and burden and gives a new dimension to Christian living. We live in his strength, not in ours. We are released to live to the full, and yet we're not living in our

strength, we're living in Christ's strength. That liberates us to live fully.

JMF: Then the gospel is not about calling people to good behavior — it's about letting people know and calling them to a new identity — who they are in Christ — to a relationship with God in Christ, and it's a whole different point of the gospel, isn't it? (Don't we usually think of the gospel as being a call to straighten out your life?) In other words, you're a sinner, and did you know it? Now that you know you're a sinner, you need to be forgiven of those sins, and so we're forgiven, we're told to behave better, and the Holy Spirit will help you and Jesus shows the way — and the whole goal is a better me through good behavior.

RW: Yes.

JMF: But the gospel is not about that.

RW: No, it's much more than that. It's not just that God has come to show us what we ought to do — he's come to do himself for us what we ought to do. He's taken our human life and he's remade it. What he gives us in Christ (this comes over especially at the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist), is our new humanity. Our task is to live out our new humanity. We don't start by trying to remake ourselves. We have been remade in Christ. We live out the new identity, as you put it, in union with Christ through the Spirit.

JMF: So the gospel's declaration is that you've been made new, therefore live like it. Not "live good, so that God will give you the kingdom." That's the opposite of what we typically hear. It's putting the cart before the horse instead of the other way.

RW: That's right. The word *gospel* means "good news." It's not the good news that we have to make ourselves better. The good news is that we *have* been made better, already been renewed.

JMF: It's almost like...the gospel is good news if you can achieve it. But sorry, you never will. You can try very hard, though, and that will make you happier. That's not good news.

RW: Usually it *won't* make us happier, because we know we can't do it.

JMF: It couldn't be more frustrating... we give up or whatever we do.

RW: Yeah. The exciting thing about the incarnation is that God himself came to do it. He did it as man, and that immediately takes us into the doctrine of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Spirit. That opens up a richer dimension to Christian thought and living.

JMF: How does it do that?

RW: For one thing, this is what God is — the real God is Father, Son, and Spirit. We're

used to thinking of God as a single being out there far off. But when we know God in Jesus Christ, we discover that God is Father, Son, and Spirit, and we come to know the real God for the first time. Calvin says if we don't conceive God as Father, Son, and Spirit, then we don't really know God. It's partly coming to know the real God.

The real God is a communion of love. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father — they live in the communion of love with the Spirit. That is the nature of God — the three persons of God. That doesn't mean there are three Gods. There's one God, and yet he is Father, Son, and Spirit, and they exist in relation.

When we begin to think in that way, then we begin to think of ourselves not just as individuals — an individual here and a separate individual there. We begin to think of ourselves in the human race as interconnected persons in relation. So it has an implication for a much richer and deeper sense of community. A lot of people are a bit scared of the doctrine of the Trinity, but I don't think they need to be.

JMF: It's into that, that Christ brings us — if we're one with him, if he comes and takes humanity, us, into himself, and he's in that eternal communion of love, then we're in that eternal communion of love with him. That's the way things are. It's been done, he already did it.

RW: That's the miracle of the Ascension. When Jesus ascended still wearing our humanity, he took our humanity into the heart of God. So there's now a man in the heart of God. He's still human. That's our destiny — to live in fellowship with God.

When we think of people, we automatically think of people as complete individuals, and you are a different individual from what I am. If somebody knows you, they don't have a clue what I'm like. But with the Trinity, it's different, because the persons are so interrelated. They're different and they remain different. They're each totally God — the Father is completely God, the Son is completely God, the Spirit's completely God — and yet they live in such a close relation that when we look at the Son and see his face, then we know what the Father is like. The Son is the image of the Father.

You are different — if someone looks at you, they don't know what I'm like. But it's the opposite when we look at Christ. He's the image of the Father. He is the Son of the Father. To know the Son is to know the Father, and Jesus says that. Phillip says, "Show us the Father, and we'll be satisfied." Jesus says, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." Especially through John's Gospel, when we listen to words of Jesus and we're drawn into his relationship with the

Father and we begin to cotton on somehow, slowly, through the Spirit we begin to think in this deeper interpersonal way. We begin to understand something as a relation to the Father, and that's the heart of the gospel — the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit that he has come to share with us.

JMF: When we talk about Trinitarian theology, are we talking about something complicated, or something simple?

RW: It's both at once. The simplest things are often the profoundest things...or put it the other way, the profoundest things are often the simplest things. There's a profound simplicity here. The person with the simplest faith can understand the Son, and the Son being the image of the Father and the Spirit. But this is something that stretches our mind. That doesn't mean that we have to be intellectual or brilliant academically, because it's not that kind of understanding. It's more a different way of thinking. There's a deep simplicity, and yet at the same time, it's profound.

“Complicated” is the wrong word. People often worry that theology is not for them, or the Trinity is not for them, because they haven't got the mind to understand it. But the thing with God is that God makes himself known to us. It's back to the thing about faith. We shouldn't think of our faith — have we got enough faith? We shouldn't think of enough reason — have we got enough reason, enough intelligence, to understand? It's more of who the God is we're trying to understand. If we focus on him, he gives us understanding — he makes himself known.

Often, when we learn something new, if it's really new, we don't know it. How do we learn something we don't know? It might seem impossible. But we all do. We all make breakthroughs. Slowly, gradually, the pieces fall into place. If we have confidence in what we're trying to understand and in the person who is making himself known, we hang in there and listen and wait, and God gives us understanding. We're led deeper into this way of thinking – especially, I think, through reading John's Gospel.

JMF: With some of the most simple things, such as if you go outside in the evening and look at the sunset and the stars, you can appreciate the profound beauty, and you're drawn into that. You have that sense of inspiration and beauty whether or not you ever study sunsets and stars and how they work (and many people do study them — everything from sensory appreciation, how we process things we see, to how stars are made). There are many things you could learn more about from a sunset and a starry evening, but you don't have to, to stand there

and appreciate it and be taken up by it. It's the same whether you know more about it or not. It's still itself. I wonder if the gospel is somewhat like that. There's a simplicity in Christ in simply trusting Christ to be our all in all, and if so, he is everything he is for us and with us, in us, whether we study more about it or not. It's something we can explore forever, joyfully, and never come to the end of.

RW: That's right. The more we know Christ, the more we are drawn into understanding his riches. Paul says that we should be mature in our thinking and have a reason for the hope that's in us. The lecture to the Hebrews says similar things. It's part of our calling, too, in knowing Christ, and being drawn into this profound adoration and love and worship, to do that with the whole of ourselves, and that includes our minds, so that we come to understand deeper.

It's not academic; it's a different way of understanding that we all have because we're all made to know and we're all made in the image of God — to know and understand and think more deeply than we think we're able to — that's given to us. My grandmother was Tom Torrance's mother. She was an evangelical with a profound simple faith. But for Tom, she was the theologian in the family, simply because of her spiritual influence — not through any academic thing learned.

JMF: If we want to understand the gospel in a truly gospel way, for what it is and for what the truth of the gospel is, or even if we want to help somebody else understand it, what is the bottom line? What is the simple thing we need to and can know, whether we ever pick up a theology book?

RW: That God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and that through what he's done as God and man for us, our lives have been renewed in him, and he gives us a new humanity.

JMF: So our faith, the thing that we're asked to believe, is something that is true for us whether we believe it or not, even before we believe it.

RW: That's profoundly true. Paul said, "While we were enemies, we were reconciled." Even while we hated God, before we heard the gospel, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. The gospel is the message of what has happened for us in Jesus. When we hear it, it's good news. It's like the story of the Japanese soldier, in I think it was the Second World War, who was marooned on an island. No one knew he was there. He didn't know the war had ended. He was discovered 20 years later or something. They told him, "The war's ended." The good

news. The gospel is hearing the good news that God has done it.

JMF: Some people don't want to commit themselves to the gospel because of the way it's presented. They're given something that really isn't the gospel. They're given this idea that you're going to enter into something where you will need to achieve salvation by doing certain things. You've got to repent of your sins, and then you can't be sure if you've repented of all of them exactly. There are so many barriers, it seems, that keep you from being able to experience joy or rest. What we often hear is not a gospel of rest — it's a gospel of anxiety — you're in big trouble and you better do something to get out of that trouble, or God is going to send you to hell. We're looking for a way to avoid hell, but we have to do something that we're not even sure we can do, in order to avoid hell. It's confused... We're saying this good news — God loves you, so receive him, but he's going to send you to hell if you don't, because that's how he *really* feels about you.

RW: To put it that way is not the gospel. But what you said is what many people believe. The gospel is that God has come to make himself known...by making himself known, that inevitably exposes us for what we are. There is a judgment on us, that we are not what we ought to be. But God has taken his own judgment on himself, and has undone our sin and put it all in the past, and risen into a new life in the resurrection. That is ours now through the gospel. We are called to live out the new life that Jesus achieved, that he lived out in his life and achieved in a permanent sense in the resurrection.

JMF: That's good news. It doesn't require fear — we can rest.

RW: Yes, that's right.

JMF: I want to ask one last thing in the minute or two we have remaining. If there's one thing that you would want people to know about God, what would that be?

RW: That he loves us and that he is love in himself — that's his very nature. He loves us so much that he has even entered into our hell for us on the cross. He's taken our godforsakenness and undone it, and cleared away all the barriers between us and him, and united us to himself. He has taken our flesh, our dust, and made it his. He is now a man in Christ. He's done all that for us. He's now with us, one with us.

JMF: That's a good reason to receive the gospel.

RW: Indeed.

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The Implications of Jesus' Resurrection

J. Michael Fezell: As you were working on the project of editing *Incarnation* and *Atonement*, what were some of the memorable moments during the process?

Robert Walker: It's hard to answer that, because I'm not sure there's any one particular moment. But working on the whole thing, it was deeply moving, and I felt this is precious, this is wonderful stuff. I heard all the lectures, but coming back to it, it just swept over me again. All sorts of things I appreciated struck me with much greater force. It's been a wonderful experience and very rewarding.

JMF: Do you remember a couple of those that stand out?

RW: For example, this emphasis on the resurrection and the meaning of the resurrection. Normally we think the gospel is the cross, and then the resurrection is kind of an extra. But in many ways, it's the resurrection... you can't separate the two. There's a verse of Paul, "Jesus was put to death for our sins and raised for our justification." Raised for our justification. It's the resurrection that makes us righteous. The cross puts away our sins, but it's the resurrection that makes us righteous.

The resurrection is an almighty event. It's not just the raising of a body from death, it's the beginning of a new creation — the beginning of the renewal of all of space and time. For Torrance, it brings out the fact that the resurrection is forgiveness. It's not just the proof of forgiveness, it *is* forgiveness, because in the Bible, sin and death are linked. So for God to undo sin, means to undo death. That means the resurrection is God's undoing sin. It's raising somebody up who has taken our sin out of the grave, so that is our resurrection.

That's why Paul says, "If Christ is not raised, we are still in our sins." Something like that, which we often bypass, it just hit me with renewed force... There are all sorts of nuggets like that in the book.

JMF: It turns everything on its head, doesn't it? Instead of hoping our sins are forgiven if we repent well enough, it gives us full assurance of salvation because Christ has already done everything. What a joy, what rest, what peace.

RW: Yes. The resurrection of Jesus is our forgiveness in action. They're identical — God forgiving and God raising Christ, they're the same thing.

JMF: You mentioned the resurrection as the new creation, as the starting place for everything — there are implications for the universe, for the whole creation. Could you elaborate on that?

RW: The incarnation means that God has taken part of the stuff of the old creation — our body — and in it has died and undone sin, so that when he rose, that was the beginning of the new creation. The early church fathers had an analogy — they said that when a baby is born, the head comes out first, and that's the hard part. But once the head's come out, the rest of the body will follow. They used that of Christ — he's the firstborn, the first fruits, and he's the head that's come out first, so the rest of creation will follow in what's happened to Christ.

That means the renewal of all space and time. The physical creation will be renewed in Christ, reconstituted under him as the new head. That's the unbelievably cosmic dimension of the New Testament, and that comes out extremely well in Torrance's writings. The resurrection is not just somebody being raised from the dead, it's the beginning of the reconstitution of everything — the beginning of heaven on earth.

JMF: That would imply that we don't know what space and time will be like in the resurrection, once we are immortal. What will that look like — as something not like what we experience now, perhaps?

RW: We can't say. But we can say that it will be this creation, these bodies of ours. We'll recognize each other, so there will be continuity. Yet what it will be like when the creation is freed from sin, death, corruption and injustice, we can't say. It will be far more wonderful and glorious — we can only look forward to it. The Bible says that it does not yet appear — we cannot yet see what we shall be like, but we know that when Christ comes again, we'll be like him [1 John 3:2]. It speaks of Jesus now having a new and more glorious body, a body which no longer dies.

JMF: After his resurrection he appeared to the disciples several times, including on the seashore, cooking a meal and eating it with them. Yet this was a resurrected body that he was appearing in and he was able to enjoy food and fellowship.

RW: Yes. I like those stories, because dead men don't rise from the dead, so it's striking that the first reaction of the disciples is...they don't believe it. The risen Jesus meets some of the women, and the women tell the disciples he's risen, and they don't believe it, and they're afraid because ...is this a ghost? No, it's real.

The fact that Jesus is raised, he's the beginning of a new creation. In the 40 days that he was on earth, the new creation was overlapping with the old creation. When he ascended, we can no longer see the new creation that is there in Christ. We know it by faith, we know it because we meet and know Christ through the Spirit. We know the reality of it, and that's what gives the New Testament its tremendous sense of victory, triumph and looking forward to what we will be. It's not "pie in the sky" – it's the renewal of this wonderful creation.

JMF: We're saved by grace through faith, and the Scriptures tell us even that is not our own. Luther goes to great lengths to explain that we must not look at faith as another work, because we're not saved by our works, so faith cannot be a work. How do the eyes of faith work? What is faith, and how are we to see this new creation and believe and trust Christ that we're in it? Where does this faith come from, and how is it not a work?

RW: It's God's work, but it's something that really happens in us. We come to see and understand and believe, but the nature of that is that we know that it's through God's work that we came to understand, because this is not something that we could do for ourselves so that we really believe and understand.

Torrance uses the analogy of the virgin birth. Mary did nothing to conceive Jesus. Joseph was set aside. There was no human input, Christ was born, a man. Something happened in Mary and she gave birth. All she did — she was told it would happen, and she said, "Amen." Faith is a bit like that — that God has become man for us — to believe, to do everything for us — and we say amen to it. Our amen is the way it happens in us. We've understood that it's for us, and we say amen. We live out of what Christ has done for us. Something real happens in us. It's a real understanding, in that it's God's work.

JMF: So our job is to believe what is so. He is, therefore we don't have to be afraid.

RW: Yes. To believe the gospel, to rejoice in what Christ has done for us — not just as God but as man.

JMF: Your degrees are in philosophy and theology. How does Trinitarian theology bear on philosophy?

RW: I did a degree in philosophy and found that very useful. It gives a conceptual understanding, which isn't necessary, but it helps to understand theology. I enjoyed my study in philosophy hugely. When I did theology, it was going somewhere. There was a purpose, there was a truth, there was a reality, and the heart of the reality in the Christian faith is the Trinity,

God in Christ. That gives us a grasp of reality as it is, so that having that grasp at once deepens and enriches our understanding of the rest of the world — of science, of philosophy, et cetera. The philosophy helps to understand it.

At the same time, the theology enriches philosophy. Trinitarian theology gives a deeper dimension. Theology helps us think in a profound way because in the gospel we know God. In theology we are knowing God not just with our feelings, our hearts, but with our minds. Our minds are inevitably deepened and stretched. So for me, there's a link between that and the fact that, I think it's true to say, most of the good philosophers today are Christians, which is a remarkable fact.

JMF: Academic work and working on a major project like this is not all you do — you're involved in outdoor sports. Can you tell us about that?

RW: I am very fortunate. Edinburgh University has an outdoor center on Loch Tay, that's a lake in the Highlands — a fabulously beautiful setting. I've worked there almost every weekend of the year except for July and August, and four or five months a year to mid-weeks as well. I teach kayaking, canoeing, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, hill walking, sometimes sailing and windsurfing. I love that. It's out in the open air, it's exercise, it's doing what I love and sharing with people. It's an ideal balance to the academic work, to theology.

JMF: We have just a little bit of time remaining, and in that time I wonder if you would mind sharing some of your personal observations, reflections on your uncle, Thomas F. Torrance.

RW: I got to know him much better at the end of his life, having been asked to edit these lectures of his after his stroke. He was unfortunately in the hospital and in a nursing home for the last few years of his life, and I visited him once or twice a week, so I got to know him very well. Things that come across — he is very personable. He took an intense interest in people. When he died, a number of fellow students wrote or phoned his brother and said that what they remembered about Tom was not his academic learning, although the amount he knew was incredible... what they remembered was his pastoral concern for them as students.

He was a minister. On the pastoral side he was always very strong, so he was a unique combination — a minister, a pastor. He prayed for his students, he prayed for all the family each day, he read the Bible each day. That's the pastoral side, you've got the academic side. His knowledge of field after field of history, of theology, was just amazing. He knew science. He had

incredible energy, he worked at great speed, and he held all these things together. He was a unique synthesis of theology and life. His experiences in the war... that would be an adventure book in itself.

I used to try to get him going on some of his war memories, because even though I'd heard them, it was good to hear them again. One time he was out on patrol with the soldiers. He insisted on being with the soldiers whenever he could, and they gave him skis. This was in Italy, in winter. And skiing down, one of his skis came off. It was badly fitting, and it clattered down the hillside. It made a noise and alerted the Germans and they began firing at him. So he had to ski down on one ski to avoid enemy fire.

There are numerous occasions when his life appeared to have been saved by a miracle. They'd be sheltering down in a trench and the person on the left and the right would be killed. Or he'd sleep in his Land Rover at night and then one night he, for some reason, didn't sleep there, and the next day there was a bullet hole right where he would have been sleeping.

He was a man of tremendous energy. He came back from the war and said, "Mother, I'm not cut out to be an academic. I'm a man of action." He had this tremendous energy.

JMF: Tell us about your mother. She's his sister, and I'm curious about how it was to live with someone who came from such a family.

RW: It was an immense privilege. There were six children — three sons and three daughters. They were all given to the Lord before they were born, or dedicated, and the way that worked out was that the three sons all became ministers and the three daughters all married ministers. It was a tremendous privilege to have that theological understanding in the family.

My father was a medic. Going out as a missionary to Africa, he trained as a minister. He was a great sportsman. He played hockey for Scotland and he was good with his hands...and I combine both. I love sport. I like doing do-it-yourself. But in many ways the heart of me is theology — it's knowing God, understanding the Christian faith, helping communicate it to others.

We were made to use our minds and know God with the whole of ourselves, and most Christians, we tend not to use our minds about God, so we miss out on a lot. But human life is, in all its richness, is about being part of the world, about doing things, so sport for me happens to be my work, but I think it's important for people to be active in some way, to use their bodies, whether it's in sport or painting or woodwork, because we're made to be physical beings, and so

to me, it's good to combine the two.

JMF: If we know who we are in Christ, there's no separation between secular and spiritual, as it were ...

RW: No, there shouldn't be. That's part of the meaning of the incarnation — that God has become man. In the Bible, in the Old Testament, the human being is body and soul as a unity. The Old Testament has no concept of a soul apart from the body, so when the body dies, that's it, we're dead. In the Old Testament the soul is thought of as a living body, a body with breath in it. That's why the resurrection in the New Testament is so fundamental, because if we're not raised, then that's it.

God loves this physical world – he made it as physical, and he's come to save it as physical, so he became a physical being, he became man, and he rose in the body. Jesus is forever bodily. We will forever be human. In some religions, we stop being human, we become god, we lose our individuality. But part of the glory of the Christian-Hebrew tradition is that God loves us as we are, men and women, children of flesh and blood, and we will forever be human.

JMF: Did Tom Torrance ever talk about pets? I receive questions frequently, and I know C.S. Lewis had made some statements about it. Did he ever comment on...?

RW: He was a keen horse rider when he grew up in China. He taught the mule to jump. The mule had never done that before. And he skied. He and his family always had several dogs, so they loved their pets and used to take their dogs for a daily walk. When you'd go to the house there's this furious barking, all the dogs were barking and waiting to welcome you.

JMF: Did he have any feeling on whether there is a reunion with pets in the resurrection?

RW: I never heard him on that, but to me everything that we enjoy in this creation will be somehow renewed over there for us, perhaps in a different form. There's a lot in the Bible about the renewal of the earth, and the meek will inherit the earth, the new city comes down from above. To me it's wrong to think of heaven as a separate place "up there." Heaven is the future state of the earth, which will be so much more wonderful than it is now, because it will be freed from all sin and crying and tears, and just wasting away or death.

JMF: Final question... If God has redeemed or is reconciling everything through himself, "whether things in heaven or things on earth," as Colossians says, through Christ, or in Christ... I don't know why people are concerned about the devil and demons, but did Tom Torrance discuss the resolution of the devil and demons in terms of the new creation?

RW: He had a strong and vivid sense, as the New Testament did, of the reality of evil powers, and Christ's whole life was a battle with evil. He used to say that evil is essentially parasitic. It cannot exist in its own right. It can only exist as an attack on what is good, so that God has made this creation to be wonderful and good. Somehow the mystery of evil is that there's this force which attacks and tries to destroy it. But Christ has overcome it.

Torrance used to use the analogy of two grindstones rubbing against each other. One is going one way and the other is going the other, and they're rubbing sparks off each other. One is saying, "I love you" and the other is saying, "No, you don't," and that for him was his picture of hell — that God remains love, God has redeemed the whole of creation, and the whole of creation is being renewed. The mystery is that some people, as far as we can, according to the Bible (and the Bible is our only authority and guide), have the freedom to say no, and they will say no. They refuse to enter this reality, and so they're on the outside, the fringe. He has a good understanding of the nature of evil and the powers of evil.

JMF: The wheels give a great analogy because that's what happens, is sparks, and it erodes you as you continue to say no to who you are, to your actual identity of who God has made you to be in Christ. Yet it is kind of scary to receive something that you're unfamiliar with.

RW: That's right, because it means we're no longer self-centered, we're no longer in control, we're no longer turned in on ourselves. We need to learn to look out, to live for others and with others, and that's the new life that God holds up for us in Christ. Some people resist — I don't know why, it's illogical, it's daft. Why would we want to persist in death when we can have life?

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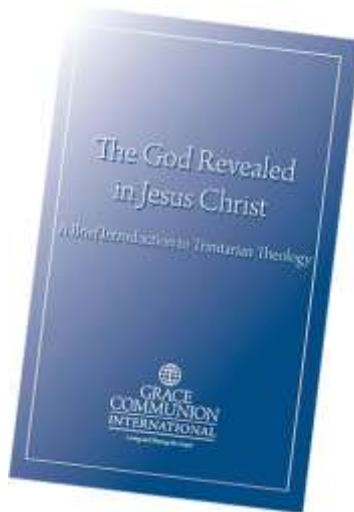
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