

**T. F. TORRANCE ON THE REALIST RECONFIGURING OF  
THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL STUDIES  
TO BE CO-SERVANTS OF THE WORD OF GOD<sup>1</sup>**

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*Thomas F. Torrance regarded as valid both the disciplines of biblical studies and theological studies. Although needing to be properly distinguished, he believed they could both contribute "hand in hand" to the life, ministry and mission of the church. However, he also saw a need to critique the approach, assumptions and methods often used in our contemporary churches and schools for educating and forming both biblical scholars and theologians in their vocations. His assessment was that they both were largely not conducted with the "realism" that a proper study requires if it is to contribute to knowing the God revealed in Jesus Christ according to Scripture and building up the church. But they are largely beholden to rather deistic, nominalistic and dualist assumptions. These assumptions are not neutral or scientific, but at odds with the biblical texts being studied and the "ultimate beliefs" pervading the entire economy of revelation. The result has been that these disciplines are inhibited from cooperatively working together and that their conclusions have been thereby distorted, confused and confusing. Only a proper non-deistic, non-dualist, realism demanded by the Object of study, the Reality to which the biblical texts refer, should and could bring these two disciplines together.*

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<sup>1</sup> This is a completely revised version of "T. F. Torrance on Theological and Biblical Studies as Co-Servants of the Word of God, Living and Written" in *Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament: Essays by Theologians and New Testament Scholars*, edited by Benjamin E. Reynolds, Brian Lugioyo, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, Germany, 2014.



*This essay surveys Torrance's double critique and summarizes his alternative approach, assumptions and methodology for biblical studies and the theological interpretation of Scripture.*

The theological works of T. F. Torrance are saturated with biblical references and myriad allusions to biblical texts. Torrance's use of Scripture matches his explicit descriptions of the nature and purpose of Scripture in the life of the church. What we know of his upbringing and his life-long discipline of Bible reading, indicate it had a central and irreplaceable place in his life and ministry, both pastoral and academic. In short, Scripture served as an absolutely unique source of revelation by the action of God, both in the past and in the present by the ministry of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the church and through the church for the sake of the world.

This paper cannot achieve the task of giving a comprehensive overview of Torrance's theological understanding of the Word of God written and the disciplines of biblical studies and theological studies. But we will attempt a much more limited project of indicating something of why and how, in Torrance's understanding, the two disciplines should be able to serve together and not be at odds with one another. Torrance saw no necessary antagonism or separation between the two, even if that is largely how their practice could be characterized in the church, the academy or seminaries of today. Torrance did affirm a proper distinction between the two that would allow for, even call for, a proper coordination. But he himself affirmed that they should work "hand in hand"<sup>2</sup> and demonstrated in his own writings how they could.

Torrance experienced himself something of the alienation or independence of the two disciplines in our contemporary universities and seminaries. Concern regarding such bifurcation was also reflected in the voluminous writings of Karl Barth of which Torrance became both personally and practically familiar, having studied with Barth and also being the editor and one of the translators into English of Barth's voluminous *Church Dogmatics*.

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<sup>2</sup> *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982; reprinted Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 121.

Part of Torrance's aim was to bring back together in a proper way biblical studies and theological studies so that both, together, might serve the Word of God, Living and so written. But in order to do that he saw the need to critique certain rather pervasive forms of theological method as well as the methods of biblical studies. In his view there are some fundamental assumptions operating in the church and in the academy that have distorted both disciplines and have significantly hindered their coordination and cooperation. This bifurcation has led to a relative autonomy of each, which in Torrance's view, has been detrimental to them both. In turn, the worship, ministry and mission of the church of Jesus Christ was being undermined.

Torrance affirmed, demonstrated and called for a cooperation of theological studies with biblical interpretation. He could characterize his own work as grounded in the theological interpretation or exegesis of scripture.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, given most current definitions biblical theology, Torrance's work does not fall under such a classification.<sup>4</sup> His understanding of just what biblical interpretation and dogmatic theology involve exceeds the boundaries to which, it would seem, most if not all of those who self-consciously engaged in biblical theology methodologically restrict themselves. Torrance sees such restriction not only as unnecessary, but also seriously misguided. It hinders not only the closely related disciplines of biblical studies and biblical theology, but also derails a proper coordination and mutual assistance to the conduct of dogmatic theology.

However, Torrance does not put the blame exclusively on the biblical studies side of things. He finds the same damaging restriction operating in the realm of theological studies. Torrance's point is that a pervasive kind of restriction applied to both the disciplines is what keeps them from serving well together and subsequently weakens each discipline and their contribution to the wellbeing of the church at large.

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<sup>3</sup> *Reality*, 42, 69, 107, 117.

<sup>4</sup> See this brief overview of three standard definitions, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/3-ways-to-define-biblical-theology/>.

Torrance has written at length about the nature of dogmatic theology,<sup>5</sup> including consideration of its relationship to Scripture and to biblical scholarship.<sup>6</sup> This essay will focus on the fundamental obstacle Torrance found to hinder and even undermine each one pursuing its own task as well as the proper working together of the two disciplines.

Torrance located the most fundamental obstacle in certain assumptions that inevitably become operationalized in the methods and attitudes of both theological and biblical studies. He was especially concerned when those presuppositions and attendant methods either qualified or set aside foundational elements of Christian belief. It was on these grounds that Torrance leveled his serious critiques of both theological and biblical studies. This essay will attempt to illuminate more fully and exactly the nature of his objection and also, even more importantly, his positive proposal for setting these disciplines within a proper framework.

Carrying across numerous books, select chapters of books and various articles written by Torrance, we find extensive discussions of the nature of dogmatic theology and, often connected with this topic, its relationship to Scripture and its interpretation. Although much less frequently, we also have some relatively extensive treatments of the relationship of theology proper to two other conventionally distinguished disciplines, biblical theology and biblical studies, the latter of which deals with the most detailed matters related to exegesis. In Torrance's judgment, interpretive or hermeneutical issues, beginning with the exegesis of Scripture, pervade all these disciplines for they all involve the discernment of meaning of biblical texts.

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<sup>5</sup> Torrance by far prefers the designation of dogmatic over systematic theology. Theology can also be regarded as having various sub-disciplines, such as philosophical and historical theology but these are not a central concern for Torrance.

<sup>6</sup> Major works addressing the nature of doctrine and its relationship to Scripture are *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982; reprinted Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999); *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995); *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1980). Also see his substantive article, "The Deposit of Faith," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983), 1-28; and essay in Chapter 8, "The Place of Christology in Biblical and Dogmatic Theology" in *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

Crucial to grasping Torrance's most fundamental concerns is the recognition of his conviction that an "ultimate belief"<sup>7</sup> of Christian faith and the church is that the Creator God, the God referred to in the biblical texts, is a personal God who intends to be actually and truly known by human creatures and has provided the means to achieve that end. Such knowledge is intended to bring about actual renewed relationship with God expressed in repentance and faith, worship and obedience, in a communion with God.<sup>8</sup> Those means that are needed have been established by this God. They are the written Word of God, the canonical biblical texts of the church, and the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ. These are the revelatory acts forged in the sphere of creation by the God who intends to be known by human creatures.

Every discipline operates with some ultimate beliefs, even those of the natural sciences, including biblical and theological studies. The fundamental question Torrance probes is whether or not these two disciplines in particular operate on the basis of the ultimate belief in God's acts of revelation and reconciliation. That is, are these disciplines conducted with assumptions, attitudes and methods geared to them serving as means to the ends of the knowledge of God according to his acts of revelation? Do they accord with reconciliation to God, the goal of redemption.<sup>9</sup> In other words, do the practices of dogmatic theology, biblical theology and biblical studies have their *raison d'être* in our knowing and being, or becoming, reconciled to the God of Scripture?

While Torrance has no particular objection to these disciplines being conventionally differentiated according to their distinct focal tasks, he marshals considerable argument against their serving other purposes divergent from this ultimate belief. Structuring them to serve that single aim is what Torrance believes can co-ordinate if not unify their efforts.

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<sup>7</sup> *Reality*, 53-58.

<sup>8</sup> Biblical examples of such are poignantly demonstrated in the Psalms as well as the Gospels, especially the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul.

<sup>9</sup> *Theological Science*, 41.

Torrance's argument about why there must be this unity of purpose is multifaceted, but at heart, fairly straightforward. His fundamental axiom, as it were, is a biblical-theologically grounded one. Scripture is an indispensable element in both these disciplines of study and Scripture has intrinsic to it a particular purpose, one that has pervaded the entire history of its formation, preservation and subsequent interpretation. The Bible itself, taken as a whole, is about God making himself known — known under fallen conditions and achieved to such a degree that it necessarily involves reconciliation — a reconciliation that is a result of God's own work of redemption.<sup>10</sup> Those disciplines of study when formed and conducted with assumptions, methods and attitudes that are at cross purposes with the nature and aim of Scripture cannot yield meaningful results that are related in any significant way to Scripture.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, their outcomes will be decidedly divergent, discontinuous and incoherent with each other.<sup>12</sup>

Torrance argues that the study of Scripture in connection with any of these disciplines will contribute to the knowledge of and reconciliation to God only if they operate in ways that exhibit direct continuity with the Apostolic mind discerned in Scripture. In Torrance's judgment that approach to Scripture was largely represented in the early church's formation of its ecumenical creeds, especially as understood by Irenaeus, and Athanasius along with the Cappadocian Fathers.<sup>13</sup> But most importantly such an orientation of these disciplines, aligned with the early church in continuity with the Apostles, would also then be congruent with the very mind of Christ as conveyed in the Apostolic word itself.

Now perhaps this all seems unexceptional and self-evident, at least for the church. However, Torrance is at pains to point out that significant divergence from this understanding with its correlating practices is widespread in both liberal and

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<sup>10</sup> *Reconstruction*, 132.

<sup>11</sup> *Reality*, 56-57.

<sup>12</sup> Torrance also maintains a continuous line of argument that any study involving biblical texts that do not cohere with their own intrinsic purpose and nature will not be scientific and so will not yield knowledge of the object being studied. All scientific study requires conforming the ways of knowing to the actual nature of the object being known, *kata physin*. Epistemology must follow ontology.

<sup>13</sup> *Deposit*, 6-14.

conservative theological/ecclesiological camps, in both biblical and theological academic studies.

According to Torrance, the misguided habits and assumptions that foster such departure have ancient roots in Greek cosmological and epistemological dualism and in medieval nominalism. These basic assumptions have been further reinforced by modern idealism and atomistic, empiricist/naturalistic modes of thought.

These modes of thought have in turn become embedded in Western institutions of higher education breeding a scientism (that is not actually scientific), skepticism and individualism which can shade off into solipsism, agnosticism or atheism. Institutionally these approaches have contributed to fostering and valuing analytic modes of thinking over synthetic or integrative learning and have resulted in specialization and compartmentalization to such a degree that a fragmentation of knowledge has resulted not only in theology but among all areas of study.<sup>14</sup>

It is Torrance's contention that biblical and theological studies have not been immune to these corrosive elements. The outward evidence of this is the compartmentalization of biblical studies from theological studies and, of course, the exile of theology and biblical studies from secular higher education. Evidence of the loss of coherence and continuity between biblical and theological studies is not just found in the organizational compartmentalization found in theological schools, but also in the dichotomous ways in which biblical studies and theological studies are regarded, often pitting them one against the other, if both are not dismissed altogether. Consequently, while Torrance was noted for his ecumenical service to the church, I think he was equally ecumenical in his desire to see reconciliation between these two disciplines and traced out a way forward towards their reconciliation, yet without a demand for their fusion.

We have now sketched in a very general way how Torrance thought that biblical studies and theological studies ought to be approached via a continuity of ultimate belief and purpose intrinsic to the economy of God's revelation and

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<sup>14</sup> *Ground and Grammar*, Chapter 2. See also Torrance's *The Trinitarian Faith* and *The Christian Doctrine of God* for extensive discussions.

reconciliation and touched on influences that have diverted them from that approach. Now we must turn to the details of Torrance's critique and prescription. That will require a survey of the three primary phases of the economy of revelation: 1) God's initiative with Israel, 2) The Self-revelation and Self-giving of God in Jesus Christ by the Spirit, and 3) The Apostolic Appointment

## **The Initiative of God**

The most fundamental fact to take into consideration in the church's coming to know God and so having the possibility of understanding God, of having anything true or accurate to say of God, is that the God known in the church is the God that has personal agency and has acted to make himself known. The knowledge of God is entirely the result of the initiative of God. The early church summarized this by saying: Only God knows God and only God reveals God. This expression is a rendering of Jesus' saying: "Only the Father knows the Son and only the Son knows the Father, and those to whom he chooses to reveal him." In the Old Testament we hear that God himself will make himself, his name, known and we read of many incidents where God takes action to do just this. We can say, along with Torrance, that God is known by the grace of his revelation.<sup>15</sup> Torrance's contention is that this should serve as an ultimate belief for any discipline involving the study of Scripture and must serve if there is to be any true knowledge of the subject of Scripture and Christian theology.

What is ruled out by this fundamental insight is attributing knowledge of the God of the Bible to human capacity, innovation, imagination, creativity, ingenuity, spiritual or moral virtue. The actual knowledge of this God in the church has undoubtedly made use of these capacities, but it is not the result of their exercise. Knowledge of God is the achievement of God among us and, in that sense, it is always a miracle, even if it is one we receive, one in which we participate.

The corollary of this fact is that we can only know God if, where, when and how God reveals himself. This is absolutely fundamental. Departure from this foundation in our biblical or theological studies represents a radical departure from

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<sup>15</sup> *Theological Science*, 43ff.

the economy of revelation. But more significantly, if there is ontological truth to it, departure necessarily means a disjunction from any real knowledge of God. Biblical and theological studies that do not build on this foundation are no longer engaged in seeking to know and understand this God. Another object and aim have supplanted it at some point.

So the knowledge of God and the possibility of any theological articulation of our knowledge begins with God, the living, acting, self-communicating, God. But more fundamental than the general description of the benefits to us of this initiative of God is the revelation of who this particular God is who benefits us in this way. This God is a speaking and eloquent God who makes himself known, not a mute God who wills to remain the unknown God.<sup>16</sup> If God had willed to remain unknown there would be no knowledge of God. But the God of the Bible is a God who wants to be known and so has acted accordingly towards his creation. Torrance refers to this as the economy of God's revelation. The outworking of this economy reveals that God is a self-revealing God who desires to be known and has made a way for just this to be accomplished among his creatures.<sup>17</sup>

Now often among those who acknowledge at the outset the absolute necessity of the initiative of God are some who turn immediately to the role the Bible plays and offer descriptions of the attributes of the Bible that are thought to establish its potential to make God known, namely, its authority, infallibility and/or inerrancy, inspiration, perspicuity, etc. In short, the line of thought goes: we know this God because God inspired Scripture to be written and written in certain ways so as to vouchsafe accurate knowledge of God. So, when we attentively and humbly read Scripture, we come to know God.

But Torrance thinks this description is far too oversimplified and can be downright misleading! Such a truncated understanding can open the door to a departure from the trajectory of the whole economy of revelation and the purpose of Scripture. It can give room for a kind of deistic understanding of revelation to

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<sup>16</sup> *Ground and Grammar*, 152, 154.

<sup>17</sup> *Reality*, 107 ff.

form and so a deistic view of God to develop.<sup>18</sup> And that would contribute to a false understanding of God of the Bible since the God of the Bible is not a deistic god.

But more importantly, simply attributing our knowledge of God to Scripture via its inspiration, fails to account for all that we have come to know about what was involved in the total process of God's self-revelation. There's much more to the story. In particular, account must be taken of God's working in Israel and ultimately in the Incarnation and the appointment of the apostolic witnesses by Jesus. Such accounting of the economy of revelation leaves no room for the imposition of a deistic ultimate belief. Rather Torrance shows how an incomplete understanding of the whole non-deistic economy of revelation and the purpose and place of Scripture in it leaves the findings of biblical studies and theology vulnerable to distortion.

Yes, in the order of our experience of knowing (*ordo cognoscendi*) we at first do not know God, and then we read Scripture or hear it proclaimed, and then we come to know and trust in this God, the God of the Bible. But Torrance wants us to pay attention to those features involved in God's revelatory initiative that are independent and prior to our coming to know God by means of the Bible. This requires comprehending God's achievement according to the order of being (*ordo essendi*). That requires our tracing out the knowledge of God according to the total reality of who God is and all that God did prior to, although concomitant with, our subsequently coming to know him in the hearing of Scripture. We have to ask, "Where exactly did Scripture come from and how was God involved in that process?"

There was a time when Scripture was not! That's not heresy. So, where did Scripture come from? The answer has to begin when God especially chose to work with Ancient Israel, beginning with the calling of Abraham and the formation of a distinct people. God established with Israel a particular relationship to make himself and his ways known to them and through them, to all the nations of the earth. That history of God's revelation journeys through the long and sometimes tortuous history of God's interaction with Israel.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ground and Grammar*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Reality*, 86ff.; *Reconstruction*, 143-44.

That interaction involves God's acting in Israel's history, a history that also involves Israel's interaction with other nations. But Israel's God also provided her prophetic interpretations of those actions, spelling out the meaning and significance of God's actions and so revealing the character and purpose of God that gave rise to those actions. Revelation is comprised of a word/deed event. Not an event without prophetic interpretation, not prophetic words without deeds. Israel not only comprehends God in acts of a given moment, but comes to understand the nature, character, purposes and will of God evident from prophetic words that disclose the heart and mind of God behind all his actions, even those that reach back to the beginning of creation, and point forward to the fullness of time when promises God made to her will be fulfilled. The prophetic words reveal realities that are ontologically distinct<sup>20</sup> from Scripture, namely, God himself and those actions of his that took place both before Scripture was written, such as creation.

Furthermore, God provides Israel with very particular ways of interacting more directly and personally with him by giving them specific ways of worshipping and living together. Israel lives in a circle of covenant relationship with God which encloses prescribed ways of living that are congruent with God's covenant relationship with them. This includes calling her to be a light to the nations. So in Israel, the knowledge of God begins to indwell or be embodied in a people which has a history and certain social, cultural, ethical, liturgical, linguistic and conceptual features. It takes on a creaturely form, as Torrance says.

Torrance, at this point, makes an important observation. Israel's knowledge of God is not complete even as the last of her prophets speak and write. In fact, part of what is revealed to Israel is that her knowledge of God is incomplete, there is more yet to come. Enshrined in the prophetic word is the promise of a greater and more full knowledge of God not only for Israel, but for all humanity. God's ultimate purposes for Israel and all his creation have not yet been accomplished. There is more God will do, not the least of which is sending his Messiah.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> We might say, realities that are ontologically *extra* textual.

<sup>21</sup> *Reconstruction*, 144-45.

As it turns out, Torrance notes, all the ways Israel was led and taught served as anticipations of what was to come. God was preparing the mind and heart of Israel for the fullness of his revelation and the manifestation of his ultimate purposes. Their ethical ways, their liturgical ways, the patterns of God's actions and interactions with them and other nations throughout the history of their relationship were not just accidental or incidental. They were purposeful preparations shaping the life, the heart, the mind of Israel in order for her to grasp and receive the greater revelation of God to come.

Scripture was born in the life of Israel. But her Scripture contained not just ideas about God but the record of God's actual interaction with Israel, including Israel's responses, and the inspired interpretations of the history of those interactions that shaped Israel's whole life, memory and hope. Thereby, the *dabar Yahweh* (the Word of the Lord) became imprinted onto their whole humanity. They became a people, the people who belonged to God, a God they knew, could trust and so worship.

In Torrance's terms, Israel was the socio-cultural-linguistic-intellectual womb and matrix formed by God in anticipation of and preparation for the final step in his activity of revelation and reconciliation.<sup>22</sup> God had acculturated a people for himself ready to receive the fullness of his revelation and presumably did so because without it no one would have grasped sufficiently, according to God's own satisfaction, that final phase of his revelation. Yes, without Israel and its prophets we would not have what we now call the Hebrew Scriptures. But more than that, there would not have been formed a people with a preserved and prophetically interpreted mind and memory ready to receive the full revelation and reconciliation of God.

Revelation, then, does not come by way of an oracle nor by private mental events or through the conveyance of particular concepts, ideas or symbols of God that are essentially mental or sheerly conceptual. Through God's own initiative the Word of the Lord was conveyed in conjunction with God's own actions and

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<sup>22</sup> *Reconstruction*, 145.

interactions with a whole and particular people played out down through a particular history of relationship.

The key elements of this history of relationship (presumably all that was needed, according to God's own reckoning) were then brought to articulation by the prophets appointed by God to speak and write. By God's own providence that prophetic word was preserved (again, presumably as God saw fit) so that it was passed on from generation to generation. And in this way God acculturated to himself a people with a particular mind.

Torrance stresses that the economy of God worked out in Israel involved revelation and reconciliation. These two elements cannot be separated, since there is in the essence of the matter no possibility of really knowing this God without being reconciled to this God. For this God is a God who faithfully maintains his covenant love and purposes and so restores their broken relationship. Time and again this God acts as Israel's Deliverer and Redeemer from iniquity who provides atonement for sin, who upholds his righteous mercy towards all. Failing to recognize and relate to this God as the faithful, atoning, healing, reconciling God is to fail to receive the revelation of who God is.

For Torrance the crucial elements of this phase of the economy can then be summed up in four points: 1) the economy of revelation and redemption is driven and accomplished by God's own initiative. 2) God's actions unfold in the ongoing full-orbed life of Israel in such a way that he forms and shapes the entirety of their social, cultural, ethical, liturgical, intellectual history. 3) the economy included, as one element within it, the formation of Israel's Scripture, 4) all this was a preparation for the further unfolding and promised fulfillment of the economy of revelation and reconciliation. Later phases of this economy can only be understood in terms of this earlier phase as it is the same God at work to accomplish one and the same purpose: revelation and reconciliation.

## **The Self-revelation and Self-giving of God in Jesus Christ by the Spirit**

The next phase of the unfolding of God's economy took a surprising, perhaps even shocking turn for Israel at the end of its preparation. God did not send mere prophets or kings or priests to reveal and redeem. God came himself. The Word of God became incarnate. The Son of God appeared in person, in flesh and blood in space and time. The people of God now beheld God face to face. No longer were they faced simply with indirect prophetic words about God and the meaning of his actions among them. But in Jesus of Nazareth, they met God, the whole God, both veiled and manifested in his humanity. No longer were they being prepared with signs and promises, but the fulfillment, the Reality itself became present and active among them, directly addressing them.<sup>23</sup> The Reality that was signified in all their previous knowledge of God now stood before them, interpreting himself to them. To be sure, this self-revelation made use of all God's providentially arranged preparations. But also required were corrections of any less than faithful apperceptions of that history of revelation, any distortions of the character, heart, mind, purpose and ways of God that might have infiltrated the teachings given and recollected within Israel.

In Christ, Torrance points out, the Word of God is embodied in the humanity of Jesus, without ceasing to be the eternal Word of God. God in wisdom and mercy, in righteousness and faithfulness, has now placed his own image among us, in the very place reserved by God's "No" to Israel against setting up any graven images. He is Immanuel, God with us. Wanting to make the distinctive nature of this phase of God's revelation and reconciliation as clear and precise as possible, Torrance emphasizes that in Jesus we have God's own *self-revelation* and *self-giving*. No longer does God stay at a distance and act indirectly or communicate through mere creaturely interpreters via the humanity of Israel. The fulfillment of revelation and redemption takes place by the direct action and speaking of God in person, in time and space, in flesh and blood, in the incarnate Son of God.

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<sup>23</sup> *Reality*, 93-99.

Torrance explores this astounding event and fact, noting that Jesus reveals himself to have existed in relationship with the Father and Spirit from before creation itself came into existence. In his self-identification with the the I-Am disclosed to Moses and his being before Abraham, Jesus places himself on the Creator side of the Creator-Created ontological distinction. He is the one his appointed interpreters recognize as the one through whom all creation was made and continues to be upheld. Jesus then, gives us a share of his own internal knowledge of the God of Israel. Jesus indicates he alone knows the Father and that others can know God the Father in this way only by means of Jesus choosing to revealing him to others. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). As John the Gospel writer conveys, Jesus alone has from eternity existed in the "bosom" of the Father and has seen him and known him (John 1: 16-18).

Assuming our humanity, within his human mind and with human words, concepts and images formed in the womb of Israel, Jesus shares his insider knowledge of God with us and accomplishes for us his redemptive purposes. There is now in Jesus a place in creation where divine and human knowledge of God intersect. There is now a place where perfect communion of God with humanity occurs — in the Person of the Son of God incarnate. At no other time and no other place and in no other person do we have embodied this knowledge and this communion.

This reconciled knowledge of God that is grounded in God is finally and ultimately actualized in Jesus Christ. But in Christ, Torrance emphatically reminds us, we not only have the revelation of God to humanity but also have the only perfect human reception of that knowledge resulting in a life of perfect response to of God. This bi-directional reality is most concretely pointed to in Jesus' own self-designation in his saying: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." He does not say that he will show us the way or tell us the truth or show us how to have life. He is, in his own person, the Way of God, the Truth of God and the Life of God and he is this now for us as one of us, in his humanity united to his eternal divine Person. So, Jesus can say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." This action of revelation

and response in Jesus is qualitatively different from any that has preceded it.<sup>24</sup> It is a *self*-revelation.

This is not to deny that God was the agent in previous acts of revelation and preparation for fulfillment in the life of Israel. But in Jesus we have an absolutely unique personal union of God with creaturely human reality. That is why Jesus is not merely another priest, another king, another prophet. He does not come to offer us more information about God or a new method or technique for approaching God. Rather, God came himself in the Person of his Son and made himself known, by his own self-action, self-interpretation and self-giving. Torrance can't emphasize enough how crucial it is to see how qualitatively different this act of revelation, reception and response is compared to all that has gone on before.<sup>25</sup> In Jesus Christ we reach the zenith of God's own once-and-for-all economy.

If study of the biblical texts embraces ultimate beliefs that are divergent from or incompatible with these non-deistic revelatory events, then we can expect no true knowledge to result and the outcomes of such study to be divergent and even incoherent with one another. But a further element has also to be taken into account to give a complete picture of the economy of revelation.

## **The Apostolic Appointment**

The story of revelation and reconciliation continues as it slopes down and away from that concrete, embodied, intensely personal high point. Jesus appoints the apostles to be his authorized interpreters through their preaching and in their writings. And this is a particular, personal and therefore unique appointment or calling. This appointment, Torrance notes, included their proper response to Jesus himself according to the truth and reality of who he was. The apostles received the self-revelation and self-giving of God as God intended, as the qualitatively unique and central event of the culmination of God's own initiative to be known and reconciled to his people. So the Apostles not only proclaimed a message but

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<sup>24</sup> *Reality*, 89.

<sup>25</sup> *Reconstruction*, 129-134.

embody in their persons the essential reception of and response to God's self-revelation and self-giving in Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

The ministry of the Apostles was not merely to hand over a message but to embody right, truthful reception and response to all of who Jesus was and revealed himself to be in word and deed. Torrance points out that this bi-directional ministry is what became identified in the early church, especially with Irenaeus, as the apostolic foundation of the church.<sup>27</sup> As the Apostle Paul put it, this foundation had Christ himself as the cornerstone and the whole renewed people of God are built upon it and into it as a place of worship, a temple (Ephesians 2:20-22).

On the basis of Christ's own initiative we now have a written record of the Apostolic teaching and their response oriented around the reality of Christ the cornerstone, gathered together in what we now call the New Testament. Torrance notes that the early church recognized that there was a center, a core reality, to which all the Apostolic *kerygma* (proclamation) was oriented. That center was Jesus' own self-interpretation which revealed his identity and the nature and purpose of his redeeming work. And key to Jesus' self-revelation of his true identity was the revelation of his relationship to the Father and the Spirit, also preserved in that Apostolic foundation.

In the mind of the early church that core became designated the "deposit of faith."<sup>28</sup> Torrance clarifies that this deposit of faith was not just the message *about* the person and work of the incarnate Son of God, but included reference to having actual relationship to the Reality itself, the risen and ascended Lord. The words of the Apostles directed their hearer's attention beyond the words themselves to the actual Living Word of God. Their intention was to contribute to the formation or maturity of a reciprocal relationship between the hearers and the God revealed supremely, directly and personally in Jesus Christ. That relationship would involve the hearers sharing in their own response of worship. They understood their words

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<sup>26</sup> "Deposit," 14; and *Reconstruction*, 135-36.

<sup>27</sup> *Reality*, 91, 92.

<sup>28</sup> See Torrance's lengthy article, "The Deposit of Faith," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983): 1-28.

to be revelatory in a secondary sense to God's own acts in Israel and personally in Jesus Christ.

Crucially, this core carries within it the worshipful response of the Apostles who shared in the responsive mind of Christ to God the Father in the power of the Spirit. That response is designated faith or belief in this God. The faith or belief of the church then is directed through the Apostolic *kerygma* to terminate on the reality of the God who is revealed thereby. The object of faith and worship is not the verbal statements, but the reality they mean, the Personal Subject to which they refer. That Real Subject is the One behind the two-fold economy of the revelatory acts. And that Real Subject is not absent, but is present to us, from the Father through the Son and in the Spirit so that we may respond in the Spirit, through the Son and to the Father.<sup>29</sup> The Deposit of Faith was recognized as the living, ontologically grounded core of the Apostolic witness and writings.

So the New Testament Scriptures were received as the "Apostolic tradition" or "Apostolic foundation" of the church which was comprised of the revelation and proclamation of the reconciliation that God himself promised to Israel and had now fulfilled in Christ. That proclamation included with it the grounds for persons making the appropriate response of repentance and faith and so which gave rise to the faithful worship of the Church.

## **The Apostolic Tradition, Scripture and Our Knowledge and Faith in God**

It is at this point that Torrance must acknowledge a crucial distinction, one that can be misconstrued if the larger context of Torrance's exposition of the entire economy of revelation is not taken into account. The revelation of God, fulfilled in person in Christ and handed on through the Apostolic foundation, aimed at a repentant belief or faith that results in a life of worship. Such worship in the life of the church is the manifestation of the fact that the revelation has reached its God-initiated and intended purpose.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ground and Grammar*, 161.

Consequently, we must say, argues Torrance, that the only true object of our knowledge and so of our faith, our belief, is the God revealed in Jesus Christ. The writings of the Apostles themselves cannot be the proper objects of faith in the same way that God himself is. The Apostles themselves, and so their writings, point beyond their own message to the realities to which they refer.<sup>30</sup> That is, our knowledge of God and response of faithful worship to God “repose” or “terminate on” its ultimate and ontological source, namely, on God the Father through God the Son and not on the Apostolic writings themselves, the NT Scriptures.<sup>31</sup>

The church does not worship the Bible. If it did it would be guilty of idolatry.<sup>32</sup> The church does not believe that the Bible will raise us up on the last day. The church does not proclaim that the Bible gave up its life on the Cross to redeem us from sin and guilt and death. We cannot say, then, that we believe in the Bible in the same way that we believe in God, Father, Son and Spirit. If our words and understanding are to be true to the nature and ordering of the realities involved in the economy of revelation, then we must both distinguish and properly relate the Living Word of God to the Written Word of God. The Bible is not divine and so knowledge of it, in and of itself, is not knowledge of God, even if it has a unique, indispensable and unsurpassable place in God’s economy. Scripture is not a proper object of our worship even if our worship, on this side of God’s self-revelation, would never arise without the Apostolic foundation.

Jesus himself warned of the danger of not acknowledging the ontological and epistemological differentiation between Scripture and himself. He warns the Jewish leaders that they can never find eternal life in Scripture if they reject him, for Scripture directs them beyond itself to him (John 5:29-40). In the mind of Jesus the purpose of Scripture is to direct them to the one and only ontological source of eternal life. Treating Scripture as the object of faith and salvation, displacing Jesus himself, amounts to the misuse of Scripture contrary to God’s intentions. But even more seriously, such misuse misses eternal life itself. Jesus identified himself as

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<sup>30</sup> *Reality*, 96.

<sup>31</sup> *Reality*, 71.

<sup>32</sup> Technically, bibliolatry.

being the resurrection and life for us. Scripture directs us to him, not primarily to itself.

Either identifying the Living Word with Written Word or separating them have a significant, and in Torrance's view, damaging, effect on how we interpret Scripture and in turn how we understand the nature of doctrinal formulations. But when properly distinguished and related there can be no legitimate way to dismiss the divinely appointed place of Scripture since, for Torrance, in the order of our knowing and being reconciled to God, Scripture with Christ as its cornerstone, is essential. So, for instance, he says, "the church must always turn to the Holy Scripture as the immediate source and norm of all revealed knowledge of God and of his saving purpose in Jesus Christ."<sup>33</sup> There are scores of other passages where Torrance unambiguously declares the same thing. How could he say anything else given the place of Scripture in the economy of God's revelation and reconciliation?

So, given the economy of God's self-revelation, how ought we to approach Scripture as the believing church? The short answer is, for Torrance, that we must have a *realist approach* with matching assumptions.<sup>34</sup> This would mean working with the basic assumption that the statements of Scripture are pointers, signs, signifiers of realities which transcend and are independent of the statements themselves. And furthermore, that the meaning of biblical statements is determined by the realities to which they refer. And finally, since these realities are the Creator God and the acts of God in history, most importantly the acts of incarnate Son of God, we should assume we have been given access to that Personal Reality by means of Scripture and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

A realist approach, whether in biblical or theological study, will include methods of inquiry that account for Scripture's particular function and purpose as

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<sup>33</sup> *Divine Meaning*, 5. See also "in this embodied form 'the Faith once for all delivered to the saints' constituted the regulative basis for all explicit formulation of Christian truth, doctrine and belief in the deepening understanding of the church . . . ," "The Deposit of Faith", 3. ". . . the unalterable foundation laid for it by Christ in himself and his Apostles." *Ibid.*, 5; and *Space, Time and Resurrection*, "Without all that the Scriptures in the saving purpose of God have come to embody, we would not be able to know God or to have intelligible communion with him within our continuing human and historical existence", 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> See *Reality*, 58-61, for a more complete discussion of realism.

an Apostolic word in relation to the written prophetic word of Israel and its fulfillment in the Incarnate Living Word.<sup>35</sup> We are given Scripture that we might be reconciled and worship according to the “truth as it is in Jesus” who is the self-revelation of God and who authorized the Apostolic foundation with Christ himself as its orienting cornerstone, the Deposit of Faith, given to and recognized by the early church. Whatever methods and assumptions made by the disciplines of biblical or theological studies must cohere with the nature of Scripture which provides for us actual, real knowledge of God and uniquely contributes to actual, real reconciliation, fellowship, communion with the Living God. They must be congruent with the message and assume the reality of the Object to be known and worshipped on the basis of that message and its meaning — the personal reality to which Scripture refers.

### **The Early Church Case Study of the Realist Approach**

What does a realist approach look like? The early church was caught up in having to sort out the relationships between Scripture, its proper interpretation and faithful theological expression. Torrance has found that, in particular, Athanasius’ and others engagement with Arianism and the eventual resolution in the Creed of Nicea provide a very useful case study. It demonstrates how, on the basis of the Apostolic teaching, the early church actually came to generate certain key theological formulations and clarified and summarized its faith in creedal statements.

In particular, Torrance traced out how Athanasius paid very careful attention to the thought of Arius and others who, on the basis of their interpretation of Scripture, came to regard Jesus as a creature, a creation of God. Athanasius was not only concerned with the conclusions reached but actually delved into how exactly Arius and his supporters reached their conclusions. As it turns out, certain fundamental assumptions (ultimate beliefs) were determinative for their interpretive methods which, then, in turn led to their theological conclusions.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Reality*, 109ff.

<sup>36</sup> See *Divine Meaning*, chapters 7 and 8.

Athanasius was concerned that our knowledge of God be expressed accurately (Grk., *akribeia*, Lat., *scientia*, precise, accurate or demonstrable knowledge) and accused Arius' thinking of being inaccurate, ungodly, rationalizing, mythological (*mythologeîn*) and finally, idolatrous.

The reason Athanasius brought up such serious charges was that the Arians<sup>37</sup> were thinking of God as if God was a creature and interpreting Scripture as if God (Father and Son) had a relationship of the same sort as human creatures have even though they affirmed that God the Father was not a created being. By making human father-son relationships the norm or criteria for interpreting biblical language of father and son, they concluded that "there was a time when the son was not" and so regarded Jesus as being a creature, one made by God, not eternal as God (the Father) was. The biblical statements were interpreted as if human relations were the normative reality. Since for humans there is a time when fathers were not fathers and they had no son, therefore the biblical statement means the same thing.

Creaturely logic, which perfectly applies to creatures, was used to interpret biblical language about God, without any accounting of the fact that in reality the God of the Bible is not a creature. So any relations God has, such as the Father begetting the Son, cannot simply be interpreted in creaturely ways. The biblical texts are to be interpreted according to the reality to which they refer or intend. The Arian assumption and method of interpreting Scripture was incongruent with, even contrary to, what was revealed in the economy of Scripture. The God revealed in Scripture is not in reality a creature and cannot be known truly or normatively (theologically) in terms of categories that apply to creatures but not to God. How they were attempting to understand the God revealed in Scripture was not ordered by the nature of the God they were attempting to understand. The interpretation of the biblical statements and the theological conclusion made on that basis were

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<sup>37</sup> Athanasius's critique not only applied to Arius but to the whole range of those who offered various amendments of Arius's particular understanding but still, in the end, refused to accept the meaning held forth at Nicaea (325) and reached its full articulation in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. See T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* for his rehearsal of the early church controversy.

incongruent with the nature of the realities being revealed concerning who God was and was revealed to be in Jesus Christ.

In fact, Athanasius noted, such thinking is ungodly, thinking of God as if God were a creature. And that, of course, is idolatrous and so cannot contribute to the knowledge of God, but rather obscures it. It is also mythological thinking, since it takes human realities and projects them onto God, understanding God in terms of human ways, creating God in our own image. Such do not express the intentions and results of divine revelation but rather project ordinary knowledge concerning creatures. The Arians failed to grasp the very nature of revelation as it unfolded in God's economy. They did not allow the nature of the object to determine how they should know it nor to determine how to interpret the biblical witness to that object, namely, the eternal Father and Son.

Finally, the Arian approach meant that there was not and could not be any real knowledge of God himself, but only myths, symbols, figures, analogies controlled by human reality and experience. If Jesus was a creature, and not one with the Father in being, act and relationship, then we have no self-revelation and no self-giving of God himself. Our knowledge of God then, could not terminate or repose on God, but only on human words and concepts generated out of ourselves with Jesus simply being one of us.

Why was this matter of so little concern to Arius and close followers? Athanasius discerned that operating behind such exegetical method and theological formulation was a more ultimate belief. Arian teachers were convinced of a cosmological and epistemological dualism which ruled out from the start any possibility of real, direct action of the Creator God within creation itself and any real knowledge of God in and of himself. The reality of God was assumed to be inaccessible to human creatures. No revelation of the reality was possible.

It was this presupposition that determined the Arian hermeneutical approach to Scripture, one alien to the Apostolic mind and foundation. Given their dualistic assumptions, mythological projection and creaturely rationalizations were the only possibility. No deposit of faith could be given the church by God. And consequently, no personal union of God with humanity as in the incarnation could even be

contemplated since such an event in reality would serve as a total disconfirmation of their dualistic assumptions. It was this unshakable ultimate belief that drove their hermeneutics and required them to affirm the identity of Jesus as being *heteroousios* (of utterly different kind of being) or *homoiousios* (of a similar kind of being) and to deny absolutely that Jesus could possibly be *homoousios* (of one and the same kind of being) as was God the Father.

The deliberations regarding the relation of the Father and Son were just one example of many to come. The church had to sort out how best to interpret Scripture and affirm the truth of the Apostolic *kerygma* by means of doctrinal formulation. And they had to do so without making their own dogmatic statement objects of ultimate faith. Athanasius and others following in his footsteps led the way by showing how to keep biblical interpretation and doctrinal formulations within the boundary of God's economy of revelation and reconciliation. Operating within such a realism, the church could then continue to share in the faithful witness of the Apostolic mind to Christ himself and so participate in the right worship of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as articulated in the Nicene Creed.

## **The lessons to be learned**

If our biblical and theological studies have anything to do with the knowledge of and reconciliation to the God of the Bible in actuality and reality and not just notionally and cognitively, then we in our contemporary situation have much to learn from the early church to guide and correct how we approach our exegetical and dogmatic tasks. For according to Torrance's lights, the same dualistic cosmological and epistemological assumptions continue to undermine the practice of these disciplines. For the assumptions we bring to these disciplines will have a powerful effect on what possible range of conclusions/understandings might be drawn from them, upon how they are thought to be related to each other and what they can offer the life and worship of the church.<sup>38</sup>

If it is assumed that God cannot be known in any direct way and that there is no normative or definitive economy of revelation and reconciliation then theology

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<sup>38</sup> *Reconstruction*, 142.

can be nothing more than philosophical reflection on various competing conceptions, images, symbols that correspond to our current understandings of our creaturely existence. The ground of these understandings will be confidence in our rational abilities, or our psychological, sociological, mystical or religious experience. And, of course, there is no way to adjudicate between which objects of creaturely study are most apt to confirm or deny the existence of God or provide a basis upon which logical inferences to God are warranted.<sup>39</sup>

God, by definition then, cannot be an object of knowledge within that human and creaturely normed frame. Given that constriction, whatever results might be forthcoming from such theology can only call for the church reinterpreting its Scriptures and the history of its life and worship in a way that reduces it all to mythology at best. Faith can only be regarded as a self-generated personal, private, psychological state of mind, not a response to a personal and objective reality that has forged a contact with us in and through the economy of revelation that extends down to us today in continuity with the Apostolic mind and foundation. God, if there is a God, must remain unknown and at a deistic distance while we merely conjecture. In effect there can be no such thing as dogmatic theology or theological science since it is assumed that there is no access to any actual theological reality. Theological statements then can have no reality to which they need to answer. They can only answer to other theological statements or systems or narratives, etc.

Some may then want to eschew theology and trust solely in authoritative Scripture, for surely there we can know God; after all God has provided it to us. However, if the discipline of the interpretation of Scripture has been infiltrated by such ancient and modern dualistic assumptions, then exegesis will fare no better than dogmatics. For in this case, argues Torrance, the only objects available for actual study are the statements, concepts and experiences of human beings that at best refer to a relatively absent God who cannot be known in any direct personal and real way.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> It seems to me that even the "properly basic" assumptions of Reformed epistemology must hang in ontological mid-air given such parameters.

<sup>40</sup> *Reality*, 80.

Even invoking the Holy Spirit will help little since under dualistic constraints the Spirit must be confined at best to the subjective aspects of human knowing while the object to which the Spirit opens us up to know remains merely the human testimony of the writers of Scripture who may have thought that Jesus was one in being and act with Father. The real objects of study then must devolve into the thoughts or psychological states of the biblical writers, or the veracity of the history of apostolic succession, or, given the socio-political, economic, intellectual climate of the early church, pursuit of the question of what thoughts the Apostles and Jesus himself could plausibly have had.

We might come to know something of the words, ideas, concepts and convictions of the biblical writers, but dualistic assumptions rule out the Apostolic mind sharing in the very mind of Christ who has real direct knowledge of God. And we certainly cannot think we can have access to the realities to which Scripture refers since, for all practical purposes, the reality at hand is simply the statements found in the Bible itself. At best we might gain ideas about God that are comparable to the biblical writers. But still, the only objects directly available to our faith are the words and concepts and narratives of the Bible. With those words and concepts in mind we may go on and logically infer truths about a God we suppose exists. But, in the end, we can have only truths of statement found in the Bible, and not the truths of being, not contact with the reality that transcends the words to which they refer.<sup>41</sup> We may possibly know something about God, but cannot not know God in a real way, a way that involves real personal and actual reconciliation and hope for redemption.

If such non-realist ultimate belief and dualistic assumptions control the starting points of our theological study and exegetical methods, then faith must be left at the door and even the biblical scholar, much less the theologian, must become a hypothetical unbeliever, standing outside of worship, prayer and devotion at least for the moment. For faith must be regarded as an unwanted and distorting presupposition that gets in the way of discerning *for ourselves*, on the basis of creaturely data available to us, whether we ought to have faith. Biblical studies then

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<sup>41</sup> *Reality*, 65-69.

is forced to take place on some kind of purported neutral ground (which arguably is a fiction itself) located outside the church.

Biblical studies then become not a means, at least not a direct means, to build up the faith of the church or to enrich its worship. At best it might aspire to clear the way for the church to justify its faith and devotion on some basis established outside the church. Biblical studies must become our attempts to make sense of Scripture, find meaning for ourselves, since within a non-realist frame Scripture cannot give us access to the reality to which the prophetic and apostolic authors referred — that is, to the source and the meaning of their writings. We may have access in some measure to the statements of the biblical authors but we cannot have contact with any extra textual reality to which they pointed, to the meaningful referent of their words.

When addressing the various kinds of diversity (of emphasis, context, literary form, language, sources, certain inconsistencies, ambiguities) that a strictly logico-historico-grammatico analysis of Scripture uncovers, the discipline itself will be able to muster few if any resources for resisting utter fragmentation, since the real unity in the truth of God embodied in Jesus and shared in by the Apostles cannot serve as an essential part of the practice of the discipline.<sup>42</sup> And doing so might, on the part of many, even be regarded as the imposition of theology upon biblical studies! We must, in that case, discover for ourselves the unity of the Bible if we assume we can't have access, at least within the discipline, to the ontological unity we affirm in other contexts, such as when we worship or pray to or obey the one and only God revealed in Jesus Christ.

And finally, if a dualism is assumed in biblical studies then there will be no established norm or center or qualitatively distinct reality that orients our interpretation of Scripture, for in that frame Jesus Christ as depicted in the Bible by its various authors may or may not be granted any special status. There will be no reason to regard him as the interpretive key of all of Scripture since for the sake of our "neutral" methods we cannot assume that he is the Logos of all things, including Scripture. If there is to be any synthesis after analysis of the texts, then

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<sup>42</sup> *Reality*, 106.

some hermeneutical mechanism constructed by the interpreters or dogmaticians must be found and brought into the mix. However, even then the unified meaning of Scripture will consist in the meaning of what we bring to it, not what we find through it, if Scripture has any meaning at all, that is, reference beyond itself.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, there will arise the challenge not only of interpreting individual texts but of knowing what value/meaning to assign the various authors (or literary units) of Scripture. When analysis brings to light differences between the various (purported?) authors or sources of the Scriptural text on what basis do we interrelate the Synoptics and John, Jesus and Paul and Peter and James and the woman[?] who wrote Hebrews? What sense will we make of various literary units of Scripture including the connection between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, or the subunits of the Pentateuch and Isaiah? Given the genre of Jonah, what sense can we make of this narrative? In every case access to any objective ontological [real] interpretive center is ruled out. We will have to bring our own preferred interpretive center to the task if any synthesis is to occur after analysis.<sup>44</sup> Of course, any center suggested will be contested by those promulgating a preferred rival. In fact, the very purpose of the interpretation of texts will be up for grabs. Methodological chaos will have ensued.

We will all (individually or corporately) have to find our own meanings in the texts and generate our own responses to them since non-realist dualistic presuppositions and the methods engendered by them do not allow for the possibility that the Written Word directs us beyond itself to the ontologically distinct Living Word who constitutes the personal reality and the unity of all of Scripture, and so serves as the interpretive center of it all.

In order to help sort out some of these exegetical conundrums some may want to borrow from theology (if this can be allowed within the discipline) a doctrine of Scripture that will include a list of its attributes such as authority, majesty, infallibility or inerrancy. But if, compelled by dualist assumptions embedded in the discipline, such doctrinal descriptions are permitted to refer only

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<sup>43</sup> *Reality*, 80-83.

<sup>44</sup> *Reality*, 115.

to Scripture itself and so proscribing any real and actual connection to the Living Word himself, little help will be found.<sup>45</sup> Inevitably, irresolvable arguments will ensue about what those theological terms mean, how they apply to Scripture, what implications there are for interpretation, and which interpretations are then acceptable. Such debates can never be resolved because all solutions proposed within the dualistic/deistic framework will still just refer to the words on the page (syntactics) and the meanings they have relative to themselves and to their social-cultural, religious and intellectually conditioned contexts such as we can discern. There will be little if anything within the discipline itself to prevent self-projections and self-justifications from gaining the upper hand in prescribing the meaning of Scripture and the proper responses to it. For Scripture itself cannot, in this frame, provide either of these to us since it is assumed to be unable to actually refer us to the Reality beyond itself, giving us knowledge of God as we receive God's reconciliation.

### **Prospects for Biblical Studies and Dogmatic Theology**

The survey above presents a dismal picture for any hope of gaining knowledge of the realities to which the biblical texts ostensibly refer us. But does it not merely describe the general current state of affairs? Do not our seminaries and churches, not to mention universities, all too often exhibit exactly these characteristics? If so, perhaps Torrance has indeed, put his finger on something. And in that case, then his offer of a correction, ought to be carefully looked at.

Torrance's agenda is to expose the employment of non-realist ultimate beliefs and the dualist epistemologies where ever they prevail in both dogmatic theology and biblical studies and encourage those engaged in these disciplines to throw off the attendant dualistic assumptions and those methods (or aspects of them) that essentially trade in them. This would be a matter, as Torrance notes, of repentance and of faith in the Living God.<sup>46</sup> This would amount to working within the disciplines as believing participants in the continuing economic unfolding of God's own ministry of revelation and reconciliation first in the church and, in turn, beyond.

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<sup>45</sup> *Reality*, 97, 109.

<sup>46</sup> *Reality*, 102.

Essential to this paradigm shift would be the maintenance of a receptive attitude to the message of the Apostolic witness. The shift would involve discerning and taking on their assumptions and purposes while submitting to and sharing in their response to the reality of the God they met and knew in Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior. It would constitute finding the most fitting intellectual tools available, consistent with the nature of Scripture as real revelation, that could contribute to a careful and accurate listening to the Apostolic human words and interpreting them in a way that assumed the Living Word of God was the ultimate reality and object of study and the Living ontological unity of Scripture. Founded on faith in the faithfulness of God to accomplish his purpose through his divinely appointed economy, the goal and aim of such study would be reception of the knowledge of God himself and life in reconciled response of communion with God.

In this way, Torrance believes, biblical studies and theological studies may very well be reconciled and serve together hand in hand while still offering distinct but overlapping and coordinated service, contributing to the doxology of the Triune God of the Church of Jesus Christ, Lord of all.