

THOMAS F. TORRANCE AND THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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Abstract: *In the theology of Thomas F. Torrance, theological anthropology has been regarded as a minor theme. However, it is in fact significantly and consistently addressed in his various theological works. In this context, this essay explores Torrance’s theological anthropology and its key characteristics. I begin by looking at Torrance’s historical understanding of human beings. I then turn to his theological understanding of human beings, that is, the concept of the relational imago Dei. Finally, I consider his onto-relational understanding of human beings in the scientific and philosophical epistemologies that he utilizes. Through this investigation, the essay reveals and argues that Torrance’s anthropology is a theological anthropology with a relation-centered, christocentric, and trinitarian content.¹*

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Introduction

In Torrance studies, anthropology is less discussed than other dogmatic themes. While numerous research projects on Torrance highlight his engagement with the natural sciences, emphasis on scientific theology, and deep theological exploration of Patristic and Reformed theology, his theological anthropology has received less notice and thus it has been regarded as only a lesser or minor theme. The *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*² reflects this tendency to some degree. The handbook comprises 18 chapters and covers the themes of Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, theological science, and eschatology, all of which have a crucial place in Torrance's theology. However, the book does not reflect the full scope and content of Torrance's anthropological understanding, leaving readers to think that his anthropology is marginal at best.

The limited attention to Torrance's theological anthropology has also caused misunderstandings of the nature of his theology. Torrance has often been critiqued by theologians, such as Colin Gunton, David Fergusson, and John Webster, for his relative deficiency of practical considerations and applications. Such critiques question whether Torrance sufficiently considers not only vertical but also horizontal facets of Christian dogmatics, i.e., anthropological, ethical, and social implications. This also calls for clear and detailed expositions of practical or horizontal implications, if indeed they exist.³

However, theological anthropology has a significant place in the theology of Torrance. It is a central theme in his early work *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*,⁴ and he continues to explore the theme throughout his theological works, such as *Theology*

² Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance* (New York: T&T Clark, 2020).

³ In terms of the precise ways in which Torrance has been critiqued by Gunton, Fergusson, and Webster, and a possible critical response to their arguments, see Hakbong Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ: Christocentric Anthropology and Ethics in Thomas F. Torrance* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 116–123.

⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

in Reconstruction,⁵ *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*,⁶ *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge*,⁷ *Reality and Scientific Theology*,⁸ "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition,"⁹ *The Christian Frame of Mind*,¹⁰ "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective,"¹¹ *The Christian Doctrine of Marriage*,¹² *The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child*,¹³ and *Divine Interpretation*.¹⁴ Although Torrance, unlike Barth, does not systematize his anthropology in a series of books, his consistent engagement with anthropology reveals its significance.

⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM, 1965).

⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology: Consonance between Theology and Science* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980).

⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelations of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1984).

⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985).

⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," *Modern Theology* 4 (1988), 309–322.

¹⁰ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order, and Openness in Theology and Natural Science* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989).

¹¹ Thomas F. Torrance, "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective," in *Religion, Reason and the Self: Essays in Honour of Hywel D. Lewis*, ed. Stewart R. Sutherland and T. A. Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989), 103–108.

¹² Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of Marriage* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1992).

¹³ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Interpretation*, ed. Adam Nigh and Todd Speidell (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2017).

Recent studies, such as “Theological Anthropology of Thomas F. Torrance,”¹⁵ *Fully Human in Christ*,¹⁶ *Trinitarian Grace and Participation*,¹⁷ and *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ*,¹⁸ shed important light on Torrance’s anthropology and ethics, thereby revealing horizontal and practical elements of his theology. With the help of such secondary literature, we can now see that the scope, content, and direction of Torrance’s theology involve both vertical/doxological and horizontal/practical implications.

The current essay aims to explore and reveal the theological anthropology that is of significance in Torrance’s theology and its key characteristics. Torrance’s anthropology has two main characteristics. First, Torrance uses various epistemologies in constructing and developing his anthropology. In the utilization of theological, philosophical, and scientific epistemologies, he elucidates and argues for two key anthropological concepts: the onto-relational concept of the person and the relational *imago Dei*. Hence, in order to properly understand what Torrance conveys in his anthropology, it is essential to have an integrated understanding of the epistemologies he utilized. Second, Torrance’s anthropology is grounded in and held together by his doctrine of the Trinity and Christology. For Torrance, the triune God underlies the definition of human beings, the restoration of personhood, and the ontological possibility of moral life and practice. Thus, in Torrance’s anthropology, the understanding of human beings is fundamentally rooted in God. Since Christ is regarded as the linchpin of personalization or humanization, for Torrance it is Christ who plays an ontological role in human restoration and transformation.

Based on the above understanding, I will first deal with Torrance’s historical understanding of humanness in the Greek, Roman, and Hebrew views of humanity,

¹⁵ Wei Jing, “The Theological Anthropology of Thomas F. Torrance: A Critical and Comparative Exploration” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2013).

¹⁶ Todd Speidell, *Fully Human in Christ: The Incarnation as the End of Christian Ethics* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016).

¹⁷ Geordie W. Ziegler, *Trinitarian Grace and Participation: An Entry into the Theology of T. F. Torrance* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017).

¹⁸ Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ*.

considering his critique of Boethius' concept of the human person as an individual substance of rational nature. I will then explore Torrance's theological understanding of humanity as "the relational *imago Dei*" and address "the concept of the personalising person of Christ." Finally, I will consider Torrance's ontorelational interpretation of humanity in his scientific and philosophical epistemologies, that is, the concepts of the "personal agent" and the "person in relation." Through this investigation, the essay will reveal and argue that Torrance's anthropology is a theological anthropology with relation-centered, christocentric, and trinitarian content and direction.

Torrance's Historical Interpretation of Humanness

The Greek, Roman, and Hebrew Views of Humanity

According to Torrance, there are three great traditions pervading western thought in the understanding of humanity: Greek, Roman, and Hebrew.¹⁹ The Greek and Roman views of humanity, albeit somewhat different, were underpinned by a dualism of body and soul, while the Hebraic view of humanity was an integrated understanding of body and soul. Torrance understands that it is the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle that underlie the impersonal and non-relational ways of thinking about humanity in the Greek and Roman traditions.

As Torrance expounds, Plato's philosophical interest lies in seeking certainty of the truth. For Plato, certainty of the truth belongs to what is eternal, unchangeable, and intelligible, which is called "forms" or "ideas," while the sense-experience of temporal and changeable objects, that is, natural events or actual situations, is not fully real, but, as it were, only "images" or "copies" of forms. In this sense, the world is divided into two realms: the visible and mutable world we live and experience, i.e., the world of copies and shadows, and the noetic and eternal world, i.e., the ideal world of forms. In differentiating the two, Plato posits a divine craftsman, Demiurge, and understands that all living beings in this visible world are given mind (*nous*) and soul (*psyche*) by the craftsman.²⁰ Although it is

¹⁹ Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 35.

²⁰ Torrance, *Divine Interpretation*, 22–23.

the soul with eternity and rationality that is imprisoned in the body with temporality and change (the body-soul dualism), a living being with a soul given by the divine being contemplates "the eternal ideas or divine forms of truth."²¹

Torrance points out that Plato's dualist view creates distorted understandings of the world and humanity. As already seen, for Plato, the sense-experience of objects in the visible world is not considered to be real. In this understanding, as Torrance argues, the world or universe is not from the realm of scientific knowledge, as the world we live in and experience together is not fully real and thus empirical knowledge of the reality of this world is impossible.²² In addition, in the visible world, real experience and knowledge of the living God and fellow human beings are also regarded as impossible, thereby resulting in a separation of the God-world-ourselves relation.²³ Torrance understands that Plato's dualism alienates human beings from all other objective realities of the world of time and space.

Aristotle rejected the theory of transcendent ideas or forms in Plato's philosophy. In Aristotle's thought, as Torrance explains, the real forms are not separated from the individual objects of the sensible world, i.e., "matter," but instead connected to them.²⁴ Hence, for Aristotle, "what is real" is not separated from or transcendent over an individual thing, but rather inherent to it (substance as it were). Therefore, it is substance that is a whole individual entity or a composite of form and matter.

Aristotle's exposition of substance, that is, his ontology, is related to his teleology. Aristotle's teleology is an account of something as a function of its end or purpose. For instance, in the process of an acorn becoming an oak, the acorn is matter with the purpose of becoming a tree. The matter (acorn) is material that realizes the form (oak), and the acorn grows according to the purpose of becoming an oak tree. At this point, Aristotle posits the "Unmoved Mover" as the cause that

²¹ Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 35-36.

²² Torrance, *Divine Interpretation*, 22.

²³ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 47-49.

²⁴ Torrance, *Divine Interpretation*, 98.

makes teleological change and movement possible. The change and movement of all beings in the world is made possible by the divine existence operating in an indirect and latent manner.²⁵

Unlike Plato, Aristotle understood that the human soul and body are interconnected. Yet, as Torrance expounds, when he considers the soul as the cause (form) of the body and the body as material (matter) expressing the soul, the soul has an existential superiority over the body and thus Aristotle shows a dualist tendency in separating the body and soul in an ontological way.²⁶

Torrance points out the anthropological problems with Aristotle's philosophy as follows. First, in Aristotle's teleological worldview, human beings are not understood as personal beings because this does not account for the individual or personal intentions and actions of an individual.²⁷ Second, in Aristotle's ontology, which defines and explains substance as matter and form, "relationship" cannot be an important element in constituting beings and thus personal relationships are not considered as essential elements constituting human beings.²⁸ Third, when God is defined as the "Unmoved Mover," humans are not regarded as beings capable of personal communication and interaction with God, as the "Unmoved Mover" does not act in the world in a direct and personal way, but only in an indirect and potential way.²⁹

Torrance states that the Hebrew view of humanity, unlike the Greek and Roman traditions, sees humans as holistic and united beings and understands them as personal and relational. In the Hebrew tradition, humans are beings with the body of their soul and the soul of their body, and they are in personal and relational intimacy with God and fellow humans.³⁰

²⁵ Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 43.

²⁶ Torrance, *Divine Interpretation*, 47-49.

²⁷ Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 43.

²⁸ Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ*, 7.

²⁹ Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 63.

³⁰ Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 35.

Importantly, Torrance argues that it is the Hebrew view of humanity that is holistic, personal, and relational, and it came from the Israelites' unique understanding of God. As Torrance elucidates, in the Old Testament, God created humans as beings with a body and soul and in a personal relationship with God. God created Adam and Eve and established a personal relationship with them, not in the eternal divine realm, but in the created world of space and time. As such, the holistic, personal, and relational characteristics of human beings are fundamentally understood through their relationship with God, which is the human identity described in the Bible. For Torrance, the Hebrew view shows that human beings are intrinsically personal and relational and that human beings do not have to escape the earthly realm and enter the infinite divine world to encounter God, thereby rejecting the dualistic, impersonal, and non-relational understanding of the Greek and Roman traditions. In this way, Torrance accepts the personal and relational understanding of humanity from the Hebrew tradition as the basis for his anthropology.

Persons in Relation

As Torrance elucidates, although we cannot find the specific concept of "person" in pre-Christian Jewish tradition, the Hebrew view of humanity offers a theological foundation for the concept of the human being as personal and relational. Further, the Hebrew view of humanity was extended when we entered the Christian era, and here the person of Christ and the onto-relational characteristics of the persons of the Trinity have had a decisive impact on the understanding of the human being as a person in relation.

Torrance argues that the concept of person was coined by the early church. It was through the concept of person that the church dealt with the union of Christ's divinity and humanity and "what he had revealed of the triune nature of God."³¹ Yet, the concept of person was also applied to human beings who are personal "in virtue of their relation to God and to one another within the interpersonal structure of humanity," and thus human beings were considered as persons in relation.³²

³¹ Ibid., 38.

³² Ibid.

So, how does Torrance understand and define "person?" As Torrance elucidates, the term "person" was adopted and used by Greek theologians as the term "*hypostasis*," referring to a "self-subsistent being in its external objective relations in distinction to *ousia* which was used to refer to being in its interior relations."³³ Although the terms conceptually involved impersonal content and meaning, *ousia* and *hypostasis* were given "an intensely dynamic and personal significance" when reflected by the theological elucidation of the triune nature of God, that is, the inter-personal and relational objective relationships.³⁴ As Torrance puts it:

Thus used in the doctrine of the Trinity *ousia* denotes being in its internal relations, while *hypostasis* denotes being in its inter-personal objective relations, for in himself God is One Being, Three Persons. In their Christian use *ousia* and *hypostasis* were now given a concrete dynamic and intensely personal sense governed by the Nature of the One living God revealed in his saving presence and activity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.³⁵

Given that the nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as persons is predicated on their personal relations, Torrance understands the concept of person in God as "an onto-relational concept."³⁶ As Torrance expounds, as the Father *is* Father in his indivisible ontic relation to the Son and the Spirit and *vice versa*, we have to precisely understand that the personal relations between the divine persons are

³³ Torrance, "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective," 114. To better understand the etymological development of the term "person" in history, see Helen H. Perlman, *Persona: Social Role and Personality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 4–5; Stanley Rudman, *Concepts of Person and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 125–126; and Udo Thiel, "Personal identity," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 869.

³⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 130.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

³⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 157.

essential to who they are as persons.³⁷ Hence, for Torrance, the divine persons are regarded as onto-relational, which is equally applied to our understanding of human beings as persons.

In this light, Torrance rejects Boethius' concept of person: "person is the individual substance of rational nature." Torrance points out that as Boethius' concept emphasizing individuality and rational substance logically derives from Aristotelian ontology, in Boethius' thought it is natural that the characteristics of human beings as persons are grounded on individuality and rationality.³⁸ In this understanding, we can therefore anticipate that the interpersonal relations with other personal beings have nothing to do with becoming a person and defining "person."

Torrance suggests that Boethius' non-relational and impersonal concept of person has had a damaging impact on the entire history of western anthropological thought. Boethius' concept of person was adopted by Thomas Aquinas and then inherited in René Descartes' notion of the epistemological subject, that is, *cogito, ergo sum* (self-certainty from self-consciousness).³⁹ In Boethius' concept of person, the individual is confined within himself, so that "his natural movement is one of self-determination over against other isolated individual subject-beings."⁴⁰ Hence, for Torrance, it is Boethius' concept of person that cannot be applicable, not only to the divine persons who are subsistent in and through their perichoretic relations, but also to the human persons who are constituted by the personal relations with God and fellow humans.

In this respect, Torrance regards Richard of St. Victor's understanding that a "person is the incommunicable existence of intellectual nature" as the proper concept of person. Here the expression of "the incommunicable existence" does not refer to a person's existence as an isolated individual cut off from the outside.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 43; *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 174-76.

³⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 123.

⁴⁰ Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 175.

Instead, it refers to a person's objective and unshared existence in the pursuit of relationships with others. Although a person is distinct from the subject-being of the other, it is conditioned or constituted by personal relations with others, and thus, for Richard, relation becomes a constitutive element of a person.⁴¹

Importantly, Torrance states that Richard's concept of person is ontologically derived from the Trinity, in which the divine persons are not understood according to their "own independence as self-subsistence," but instead based on their "ontic relations to other persons."⁴²

Torrance accounts for the theological and anthropological implications of the onto-relational concept of person: (1) since the triune God is "the creative, archetypal Source of all other personal beings and their interpersonal relations of love," all other created personal beings must be understood by "its source and its end, that is, by reference to the fullness of Love and personal Being in the Trinity"⁴³; and (2) the human being is fundamentally open to others and an essentially personal being, not in its individuality or self-subsistence, but in its personal relations with other beings.⁴⁴ In this way, the onto-relational concept of person reveals the intrinsic inseparability between the individual and their personal relations.

Torrance's Theological Understanding of Human Beings: The Relational *imago Dei*

According to Torrance, in the Old Testament, the creation of humanity as unitary beings with body and soul originated *ex nihilo*. The Old Testament creation account shows that God is the source of human existence, and thus, as created beings, humanity is contingent on God. Although all created beings are contingent on God, human beings have a distinctively contingent nature by virtue of the fact that God directly addresses humanity, resulting in their personal communion with God.

⁴¹ Ibid., 176.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 176–177.

⁴⁴ Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man," 310–312.

For Torrance, the distinct contingency of human being that is grounded in communion with God is now related to human identity as *imago Dei*. Rejecting the Platonic notion of any pre-existing soul and the Aristotelian static relationship between God in his deity and humanity, Torrance understands that in vertical contingency on God and personal interaction with him, the human being exists in the image of God. Therefore, for Torrance, human beings are regarded as the image of God "not in virtue of our rational nature or of anything we are inherently in our own beings, but solely through a relation to God in grace into which he has brought us in the wholeness and integrity of our human being."⁴⁵

Torrance finds this relational *imago Dei* in the "spirit-Spirit relation" and the "male-female relation" in the creation of human beings. As Torrance notes, in creation the human spirit was given its existence in the personal relationship with God's Creator Spirit, who upholds and sustains human existence in his/her contingent openness and relation to God.⁴⁶ Through the power and presence of the Spirit, the human spirit is related to the triune God and given "the capacity to think and act in accordance with the nature (*kata physin*) of what is other than himself," that is, human rationality.⁴⁷ Thus, the human spirit is thought of only as subsistent in the personal and dynamic relationship with the Spirit.

In this respect, for Torrance, the human spirit is not something human beings have, nor the spark of the divine that Plato states, but instead a "transcendental determination" of their existence or "the ontological qualification of his/her soul," which is given and sustained by the Spirit.⁴⁸ In light of this, the human creature is an essentially relational being constituted only by "the being-constituting relation of the Creator."⁴⁹

The relational *imago Dei* is also found in the male-female relation. Torrance notes that in the biblical creation narrative, the human creature is created not as a

⁴⁵ Ibid., 317.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 310.

⁴⁷ Torrance, "The Soul and Person," 110.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man," 311.

solitary individual, but as a man and a woman in love and marriage to become "one flesh." When human beings begin their life in this loving union, it means that the basic unit of humanity is relation, not individual, and thus the essential fabric of human being is "co-humanity." Therefore, for Torrance, human beings are understood as relational beings whose existence and life are constituted in their vertical relation with God and their horizontal relation with others.⁵⁰

Torrance argues that the Old Testament understanding of humanity as the relational *imago Dei* is deepened and strengthened through "the acute personalization of human relations with God in Jesus Christ."⁵¹ For Torrance, Jesus Christ is decisive and central to the Christian understanding of humanity as the image of God: Christ (1) is the true image and reality of God and humanity; (2) fully restored and embodied the relational *imago Dei* in and through the union of divinity and humanity in his one person; and (3) now, through the Holy Spirit, Christ unites us with him and draws us into communion with the triune God who constitutes our being and life.⁵²

For Torrance, union with Christ through the Holy Spirit is the point of ontological transformation. Through Christ, we are drawn into communion with God where human distortion, malice, and corruption are healed and resolved, and we are thereby transformed into "the human beings we ought to be," that is, human beings in truly personal relations with God.⁵³ The ontological restoration brought about by the vertical relationship with God through Christ also impacts human behavior and lifestyles, and so personal relations with neighbors are gradually restored. As a result, we become onto-relational persons who exist and live in personal relations with God and our neighbors. Hence, for Torrance, human ontological restoration through union with Christ is the creative source for personal and ethical lives in human communities.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 39.

⁵² Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ*, 24–25.

⁵³ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 70; "The Goodness and Dignity of Man," 315.

Thus, for Torrance, Christ is a “personalising person,” while human beings are “personalised persons” who receive “the true substance of our personal being both in relation to God and in relation to one another.”⁵⁴ The sinful humanity that was alienated from God experienced atonement, sanctification, righteousness, and reconciliation through union with the divinity of Christ in his incarnation. The Holy Spirit unites us with Christ, so that “personalisation,” already accomplished *objectively* or ontologically in and through the vicarious humanity of Christ, i.e., the full restoration of the relational *imago Dei*, is now realized *subjectively*.⁵⁵ In union with Christ, we not only participate in the human nature that is already fully personalized through Christ, but also in the fellowship of the triune God, a participation that gives rise to a personal transformation in our being, life, and relations.

To sum up, in Torrance’s theological understanding, the human being is the relational *imago Dei* or onto-relational person whose existence and life are constituted by personal relations with God and others. Through union with Christ, the personalizing person, the human being is personalized and drawn into fellowship with the triune God who is the creative source of our ontological and relational change. In this respect, Torrance’s anthropology can be understood as a theological anthropology with a relation-centered, christocentric, and trinitarian content and direction.

Torrance’s Scientific and Philosophical Understanding of the Human Being: The Personal Agent and Person in Relation

Torrance’s relation-centered anthropology is further supported and developed through scientific and philosophical epistemologies. This is evident in the concepts of Michael Polanyi’s “personal knowledge” and John Macmurray’s “person in relation” that Torrance accepted and utilized.

⁵⁴ Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind*, 39.

⁵⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, “Introduction,” *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church*, ed. and trans. Thomas F. Torrance (London: James Clarke and Co., 1959), cvi–cxviii.

Personal Knowledge

Polanyi, a Hungarian chemist and philosopher, is one of the most influential scholars in the philosophy of science. Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* (1958) is considered to be his most important book; in this he emphasizes the personal aspect of human knowledge. In opposition to Newton's mechanistic worldview, in which belief is treated as mere opinion or unfounded conviction lacking any element of scientific knowledge, Polanyi argues that belief facilitates "an intuitive grasp of a reality" and thus is an essential component of knowledge.⁵⁶

For Polanyi, scientific knowledge is not a logical process derived from inquiry through deductive reasoning. Rather, knowledge arises from a direct and intuitive encounter with an objective reality that takes place within the mind of the human knower. Of course, the intelligibility of objective reality is inherent in its nature: it is invisible and must be thought of as independent of us, but through belief or intuitive understanding, the mind of the intellectual can grasp the perceptible characteristics of objective reality.⁵⁷ In this case, knowledge is a personal element and it is only possible within a person's engagement with an objective reality. Hence, for Polanyi, knowledge is personal knowledge obtained in a human knower's personal relation with the objective reality through personal participation and responsible commitment.⁵⁸

Following Polanyi, Torrance argues that in scientific knowledge the human agent must be regarded as a person in relation to objective reality through a fiduciary framework, that is, belief or faith. Interestingly, Torrance understands that the personal nature in scientific knowledge is also found in theological knowledge. As Torrance elucidates, both science and theology, despite being different in scope and content, derive their beliefs from the intelligibility inherent in the object of belief. In theological knowledge, human convictions and beliefs about God arise

⁵⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998), 114.

⁵⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, *Belief in Science and in Christian Life: The Relevance of Michael Polanyi's Thought for Christian Faith and Life* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1980), 9.

⁵⁸ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 66, 160–170, 299–316

within us “as basic acts of assent and acknowledgement on the part of our minds to divine Reality which we cannot know except on grounds of service and obedient listening or submission.”⁵⁹ In this way, scientific and theological activities share the fiduciary component of knowledge. In science and theology, the objective reality, that is, the world or God, and its perceptible nature and characteristics are not identified and revealed through antecedent concepts or the process of impersonal and abstract inquiry, but instead through the personal and heuristic process of knowing.⁶⁰

For Torrance, Polanyi’s concept of personal knowledge has the following anthropological significance. First, in the concept of personal knowledge, human beings are in personal relations with objective reality and they are portrayed as beings who can grasp the nature of objective reality. Thus, in scientific knowledge humanity is a personal and rational agent in a personal relationship with realities. Also, when understanding human beings as personal agents, objectivism, which separates personal convictions or actions from the objective reality in order to secure pure knowledge, is excluded, and thus human beings are understood as persons who obtain scientific and theological knowledge in their personal interrelations with God and the world.⁶¹

Persons in Relation

Torrance explains and develops his onto-relational concept of person not only through Polanyi’s philosophy of science, but also through the personalist philosophy of Macmurray, a Scottish philosopher. Accepting Macmurray’s understanding of the personal relationship between reason and reality and his concept of human beings as not isolated individuals, but persons in relation, Torrance rejects the impersonal and non-relational understanding of human beings.

Torrance critiques Descartes’ approach to knowledge, which begins with “doubt” as a form of self-assurance. Human beings are the thinking self and acquire

⁵⁹ Torrance, *Belief in Science and in Christian Life*, 12.

⁶⁰ Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 67–68.

⁶¹ Torrance, *Belief in Science and in Christian Life*, 12.

knowledge of the objective reality through the process of doubting or observing phenomena. Torrance elucidates that, in this process, knowledge of reality becomes nothing more than an intellectual description that arises within self-consciousness or thought. Put another way, objective realities, such as the world, God, and other humans, are recognized in self-consciousness, not in personal communication and interrelation. In this way, it is not relationality but self-consciousness that is an important factor in obtaining knowledge about realities, resulting in an impersonal and non-relational conception of God-world-ourselves.⁶²

Based on Macmurray's understanding that "reason is our capacity to behave consciously in terms of the nature of what is not ourselves," Torrance also considers "reason" as the ability to act.⁶³ Thus, for Torrance, like Macmurray, it is reason that makes knowledge of reality possible by grasping the nature of the reality revealed to us, a process that is not confined to intellectual ways of thinking, but occurs in all aspects of human life and behavior in relation to objective reality.

In this respect, Torrance understands that knowledge is *a posteriori* and heuristic. For Torrance, the heuristic understanding of knowledge becomes a proper approach to our scientific, anthropological, and theological knowledge. When we understand knowledge as *a posteriori* knowledge that is only possible through a personal relationship with the objective reality, human beings are understood as persons in relation. In this light, the distorted understanding of human beings, that is human beings as isolated individuals or observers separated from personal relations with realities, is rejected. Thus, for Torrance, relationships with objective realities occurring in the realm of human life are essential to understanding the personal and relational characteristics of human beings, an understanding that is in line with Macmurray's understanding that "personal existence is constituted by the relation of persons."⁶⁴

⁶² Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 57.

⁶³ Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 122.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 232; John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 12.

Conclusion

Through the above exploration, we have seen key features of Torrance's anthropology. In summary, in the wide-ranging utilization of theological, scientific, and philosophical epistemologies, Torrance reveals that human beings must be considered onto-relational persons created in *imago Dei*, thereby rejecting impersonal and non-relational understandings of human beings based on rationality and individuality. His exposition of the onto-relational characteristics of humanity presented in various epistemologies can be considered an advantage of Torrance's anthropology. Moreover, Torrance's anthropology clearly reveals why Christian anthropology must be understood in christocentric and trinitarian ways of thinking. Jesus Christ is the perfect image and reality of God and humanity, and through the Holy Spirit we can now have union with Christ who draws us into the trinitarian fellowship and communion, i.e., the creative source of human ontological transformation.

It is important to note that when Torrance understands human beings as onto-relational persons constituted by interpersonal relations with God and others, this understanding is not merely a dogmatic exposition, but also extends to practical implications. Inasmuch as the understanding of the dynamic, personal, and mutually indwelling fellowship and relationship of the triune God offers an intellectual foundation for the interpersonal structure and content of human society – *what human beings and life ought to be* – a theological anthropology, which sheds important light on and reveals the personality and rationality of the triune God, can be essential to overcoming individualism and fostering communion. Through an understanding of human beings as persons in relation created in *imago Dei*, we can also move towards a more egalitarian and inclusive society with mutual communication. In this respect, Colin Gunton asserts that a Christian anthropology based on the mutual personal relations of the triune God are necessary in contemporary culture and society.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Colin Gunton, "Being and Person: T. F. Torrance's Doctrine of God," in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: Theologians in Dialogue with T. F. Torrance*, ed. Elmer M. Colyer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 131.

Given the social impact of a relational-centered anthropology, Torrance's anthropology can function as an epistemological tool that supports interpersonal and intercommunicative human relationships and societies. Torrance's emphasis on the significance of union with Christ as the personalizing person also clearly reveals where Christian anthropology derives its main force. In union with Christ through the Spirit, we are truly personalized or humanized so that our being, life, and relationship encounter personal and relational restoration and transformation.

Importantly, based on his onto-relational understanding of humanity, Torrance dealt with some ethical and social issues, such as gender equality in the family and society, the role of women in ministry, and abortion, thereby revealing the practicality of his anthropology.⁶⁶ In this way, his anthropology has positive impacts on numerous areas of human society, including the home, church, school, and the workplace, where more equal and interpersonal relationships are required. Therefore, we can evaluate Torrance's anthropology as a theological and practical anthropology with personal and relational implications that are necessary and essential for social ethics.

⁶⁶ For more on ethical issues in the theology of Torrance, see Kim, *Person, Personhood, and the Humanity of Christ*, 123–139.