

## **YOU WONDER WHERE THE PNEUMATOLOGY WENT?**

### **Thomas F. Torrance and Third Article Theology**

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**Abstract:** *The contention of this essay is that despite Torrance's rigorous and developed trinitarianism in which the Holy Spirit is often discussed, Torrance's theology lacks what we might term a robust pneumatology. In this essay, a doctrine of the Holy Spirit indicates a considered and even comprehensive place is given to the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Holy Trinity. A pneumatology, however, is a more expansive enterprise in which the person and work of the Holy Spirit are studied in detail. Torrance's theology is rich in its discussion of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit but at the same time offers a deficient pneumatology. The essay proceeds along the following lines: first, Torrance's commitment to an orthodox trinitarianism is established before, second, Torrance's doctrine of the Holy Spirit is described. Finally, the deficiencies in Torrance's pneumatology will be identified and discussed.*

## Introduction

Thomas F. Torrance offers a richly textured theology of the Trinity across his expansive corpus. Paul Molnar rightly chose to call Torrance the “theologian of the Trinity” when he penned his critical summary of Torrance’s theological contributions.<sup>1</sup> To say that Torrance was one of the most thoroughgoing and comprehensive theologians of the Trinity throughout the latter half of the twentieth century should not be controversial to any well-informed reader of theology. The contention of this essay is that despite Torrance’s rigorous and developed trinitarianism in which the Holy Spirit is often discussed, Torrance’s theology lacks what we might term a robust pneumatology. On the surface, this may sound contradictory, so let me explain. In this essay, a doctrine of the Holy Spirit indicates a considered and even comprehensive place is given to a discussion of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Holy Trinity. A pneumatology, however, is a more expansive enterprise in which the person and work of the Holy Spirit is studied in detail and in relation to other doctrines such as creation, salvation, or eschatology. This is an idiosyncratic distinction between a doctrine of the Spirit and a pneumatology, and is used here for illustrative purposes. A pneumatology is a thick description of the effect a doctrine of the Spirit has upon the system of theology. It may be useful to illustrate by use of a contrast. Torrance’s work clearly presents a doctrine of Jesus Christ and a rigorous Christology. What is the difference? A doctrine of Jesus Christ is concerned with establishing the identity and mission of Jesus; a Christology acts more like a heuristic device and is put to work on helping to define, for example, a cosmology, an epistemology, an eschatology, and so forth. Torrance developed his Christology as rigorously as anyone: he did not do the same with his pneumatology. Torrance’s theology is rich in its discussion of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit but at the same time offers a deficient pneumatology.

The essay proceeds along the following lines: first, Torrance’s commitment to an orthodox trinitarianism is established before, second, Torrance’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit is described. Finally, the deficiencies in Torrance’s pneumatology will be pointed out.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham: Routledge, 2009).

## 1. Orthodox Trinitarianism

Torrance was highly influenced by the church fathers, especially the Greek Fathers of the fourth century. His favorite theologian, he never tired of pointing out, was Athanasius, and the conciliar tradition was the guiding theological interpretation of Holy Scripture throughout Torrance's work. The *homoousion* ("the king-pin of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed"),<sup>2</sup> the hypostatic union, and other patristic formulae were heuristic devices Torrance often put to work in the service of constructive theology. If writing today, Torrance would squarely be considered an advocate of what Lewis Ayres has termed "pro-Nicene" theology (which is also pro-Chalcedonian theology).<sup>3</sup> Torrance is a conciliar theologian in the sense that the creeds of Christendom, along with the confessions of his own Scottish Kirk tradition (and the wider Reformed church), are his theological guides. It is unsurprising, then, that Torrance evinces a commitment to the doctrine of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit as a triune person.

Torrance recognized the sixteenth centenary of the Council of Constantinople in 1981 with two significant works: the first, an edited book on the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of A.D. 381, in which Torrance provided an introductory essay,<sup>4</sup> and the second, the Warfield Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary subsequently published as *The Trinitarian Faith*, in which we find a significant essay on the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> In the earlier work, Torrance affirms the Nicene commitment to understanding the Trinity as the indivisible unity between the Father, Son, and Spirit, even if the Spirit hardly gets a mention in this work. He writes,

What the *homoousion* did was to give expression to the ontological

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, "Introduction," in *The Incarnation: Ecumenical Studies in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 381*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1981), xi.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Torrance, ed., *The Incarnation*, containing Torrance's "Introduction," xi-xxii, which was originally a sermon preached in Norwich Cathedral.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, Cornerstones Series (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), containing the essay "The Eternal Spirit," 191-251.

substructure upon which the meaning of various biblical texts rested and through which they were integrated. As such, it proved to be one of those movements of thought from a preconceptual to a conceptual act of understanding which the committed mind takes under the compelling demands of the reality into which it inquires, in this instance, the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

In this initial essay, Torrance establishes the truth that the so-called economic Trinity is the same as the ontological Trinity and what is revealed of God by Christ is true.

In the second and more substantial work, Torrance deals at length with the third article of the Creed.<sup>7</sup> Almost all references in this work are to the Fathers of the Greek East — or what Torrance terms “eastern catholic theology.”<sup>8</sup> The key principle of pro-Nicene theology, according to Torrance, is this: only God can reveal God and only so via reconciliation. “Here Torrance is representing a distinctive feature of Christian theology that he first learnt from Barth and then from the patristic theologians, that revelation equals reconciliation, ‘for it is only through reconciliation to God by the blood of Christ that we may draw near to him and have access to him.’”<sup>9</sup>

In his explanation of the third article, Torrance is clear that belief in God means belief in the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, “Thus in the Nicene Creed belief in the Holy Spirit is bracketed together with belief in the Father and in the Son, as belief in one God and Lord.”<sup>10</sup> Further evidence of the divinity and equality of the Spirit is given by the designation “Holy,” which expresses the

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<sup>6</sup> Torrance, “Introduction,” xii–xiii.

<sup>7</sup> A critical introduction to the book can be found here: Myk Habets, “The Essence of Evangelical Theology,” Critical Introduction to Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, in Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, vii–xxxii.

<sup>8</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Habets, “The Essence of Evangelical Theology,” x, citing Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 191.

immanence and “irreducible transcendence” of the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> God is a personal reality and a dynamic event, and this is designated by the term “Holy Spirit.” As the Spirit is Holy and fully God, he draws to himself the same awe and adoration as the Father and the Son.<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that Torrance will shy away from applying this insight, as we shall see below.

The use of the term *S/spirit* in Scripture designates both *ousia* and *hypostasis*, both the generic being of God and the person of the Holy Spirit. From this, Torrance follows Athanasius in articulating the Son as the image (*eidos*) of the Father, and the Spirit is the image (*eidos*) of the Son. For this reason, the fathers can refer to the Spirit as *homoousios* with the Son in the same way as they speak of the Son as *homoousios* with the Father.<sup>13</sup>

In a sort of prolegomenon to the third article, Torrance outlines the fundamental biblical basis upon which a doctrine of the Spirit was established. Uppermost in this regard is the baptismal name for God, the name into which all converts are baptized.<sup>14</sup> The other two places Torrance singles out for mention are the benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 and the teaching on the giver of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. All three texts — Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14, and 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 — start with a different divine person, showing their equality. Other New Testament triadic formulae support this.<sup>15</sup> There is a diversity in order which shows equality and a mixture of doxological and mediatorial terms. The creed thus makes explicit what is found in the New Testament and in early Christian worship (hymns, etc.). From these foundations, a doctrine of the Holy Spirit was then developed by the Greek fathers.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>13</sup> The teaching of the *homoousion* of the Spirit was raised at this time between Nicaea and Constantinople by Epiphanius, etc. See Ibid., 195.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 197, 198. See Rodrick Durst, *Reordering the Trinity: Six Movements of God in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2015).

Torrance looks to Athanasius, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and Epiphanius for the development of a comprehensive doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In their hands, the Son reveals the Father and is *homoousios* with him, the Son reveals the Spirit and is *homoousios* with him, the Spirit reveals the Son and is *homoousios* with him, and the Spirit reveals the Father through the Son and is *homoousios* with him. Torrance can conclude, "The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is derived, therefore, not merely from biblical statements, not from doxological formulae alone, but from the supreme truth that God reveals himself through himself, and therefore that God *himself* is the content of his revelation through the Son and in the Spirit."<sup>16</sup> The result is a fully onto-relational theology whereby each of the divine persons ontologically constitutes the others. Cyril and Basil developed these emphases, but Epiphanius brought them to clear affirmation and influenced the formulation at 381.<sup>17</sup>

From prolegomena, Torrance moves to explication. First, "Spirit" in the absolute sense simply means divine. Thus, no crude use of creaturely or material images of God is admissible. The clear epistemic implication is that we only know God by God, we only know the Spirit from his internal relations within the Godhead *and then* from his economic activity.<sup>18</sup> Based on the belief that the Spirit is divine and on the necessity of the Spirit in the triunity of God, Torrance's argument is that to have the Spirit is to have the entire Godhead. This is the basis for Torrance's rejection of the Basilian (and then Palamite) doctrine of the divine essence *vs.* the divine energies.<sup>19</sup>

Several implications can be drawn from this Nicene teaching on the Spirit. As stated earlier, Spirit implies *ousia* and *hypostasis*, the mystery and ineffability of God. Thus, for Torrance the Holy Spirit remains veiled in a way the Father and the Son are not.<sup>20</sup> The Spirit is the "face of the Father" seen in the face of the Son, yet

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<sup>16</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 202.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 209–10. See Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 224.

<sup>20</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 211.

the Spirit has no face.<sup>21</sup> There are three divine persons but only one image for there is one God. This leads Torrance to declare of the Holy Spirit: "We do not know him face to face in his one hypostasis."<sup>22</sup> We thus experience three hypostaseis "as one person/prosopon."<sup>23</sup>

The *homoousion* of the Son with the Father has the effect of personalizing the Father in our experience. The *homoousion* of the Son with the Spirit has the same effect — it personalizes our experience of the Spirit, and the *homoousion* of the Spirit with the Son personalizes the Son in our experience.<sup>24</sup> Torrance then appeals to Gregory Nyssen that we know the Spirit in a "sublime and exalted" way as "he is in his own person and in his life-giving power."<sup>25</sup> This does appear to contradict Torrance's earlier point that we can't really know the Spirit in his own hypostasis, only through, in, and as, the Son. This is a point of tension in Torrance's trinitarian theology.

Turning again to one of his favorite fathers, Epiphanius, Torrance further develops his relational ontology of the Godhead. Epiphanius spoke of personas as "enhyposstatic" in God, that is, each person coinheres hypostatically in the Godhead.<sup>26</sup> The *homoousion* of the Spirit means the Spirit is "in the midst" of the Father and Son or is the "bond of the Trinity."<sup>27</sup> The Spirit shares fully in the reciprocal knowing and communing of the divine persons and that is what Nicene theology means by God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in onto-relationship. This allows Torrance to advocate for the highly nuanced, but important distinction that

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 213. This is perhaps where I disagree with Torrance the most. I do not see the texts or the theo-logic leading to these consequences, and I think this fails to honor what was affirmed earlier, that we know, honor, and worship the Spirit as we do the Father and the Son. More of this below.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 222.

the *monarchia* of God is not the Father but the Godhead (*ousia*) only then expressed by the Father (*hypostasis*).<sup>28</sup>

Finally, Torrance turns to the procession of the Holy Spirit. As with the Son, so too with the Spirit — both are *homoousios*, both essentially God, and they are so enhypostatically. Torrance is critical of the Cappadocians for introducing cause and sequence into generation and spiration. The Cappadocians located cause in the *person* of the Father and thus introduced an implicitly Arian view of God. Didymus followed suit by replacing the Athanasian and Nicene procession of the Spirit from the *being* of the Father to a formulation that asserted a procession from the *person* of the Father. Gregory Nazianzen and Epiphanius provided a much more compelling account of the Godhead, in Torrance's estimation, in that they did not attribute cause to the person of the Father but to the entire Godhead and only then to the Father. The Spirit proceeds from the Father *with* the Son.<sup>29</sup> What Torrance understands pro-Nicene/pro-Chalcedonian theology arguing is what I call in my writings a relational ontology whereby each person is enhypostatic in the others and the mutual coinherence (*perichoresis*) of the three is their unity.

It was, then, in these terms that Epiphanius interpreted and filled out the succinct Athanasian statement that 'the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and receives from the Son', but in such a way that the enhypostatic realities and distinctive properties of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit always remain the same in the equality and

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 223. This is worked out in a comprehensive manner in "The Agreed Statement on the Trinity," in *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, vol. 2., ed. Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1993), 219–226.

<sup>29</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 244.



consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity.<sup>30</sup>

Torrance claims, with some justification, that the *Filioque* controversy would have been avoided if Athanasian-Epiphanian-Cyrrillian theology was more closely followed.<sup>31</sup>

As a brief summary, Torrance reads the creeds and adopts them into his theology; the Spirit is the bond of the Trinity; dwells in midst of the Trinity; creates community among God and creatures; and brings human creatures into the divine community. The church, also a part of the third article of the creed and thus part of the Spirit's work, is the body of Christ due to the unique communion and personalization of the Spirit. The church is thus the locus of *theosis*. Torrance's theology is classically conciliar, follows the pro-Nicene/pro-Chalcedonian theology closely, and as such, argues incontrovertibly for the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit as *homoousios* with the Son and by implication with the Father, hence he is fully God, the "the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and (or, through) the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified." This much is clear.

## 2. A Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

That Torrance is committed to an orthodox trinitarianism that includes the full deity of the Holy Spirit has been established. What Torrance goes on to create is what he

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 245. A relational ontology and onto-relational account of the divine being is found more clearly in the works of Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, vol 2: The World: Creation and Deification*, trans. and ed. I. Ionita and R. Barringer (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 260–2; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 317–20; and Thomas G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), among others. For my own constructive work, influenced by the theology of Torrance, see Myk Habets, "Filioque? Nein: A Proposal for Coherent Coinherence," in *Trinitarian Theology after Barth*, ed. Phillip Tolliday and Myk Habets (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 161–202, and "Getting Beyond the *Filioque* with Third Article Theology," in *Ecumenical Perspectives on the Filioque for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2014), 211–30.

<sup>31</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 246. See Myk Habets, "Getting Beyond the Filioque with Third Article Theology," 211–30.

termed a "dynamic Triunity."<sup>32</sup> Dynamic Triunity is Torrance's term for what I am calling a relational ontology of the Godhead. Torrance developed a doctrine of the Trinity that was at once classical and distinct. As seen in the previous section, Torrance's doctrine of the Trinity is classical in the sense that it subscribes to the conciliar tradition and posits one being, three persons, each of those persons are consubstantial and equally God. His work is distinct in that it does not conform to later developments in Latin trinitarianism, nor does it repeat Eastern, especially Cappadocian, emphases that trade on the *monarchia* of the Father. In order to develop such a dynamic Triunity, Torrance says "we must have a proper doctrine of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit."<sup>33</sup>

God's self-communication was fully realized in the incarnation "for it is in hypostatic union that the self-giving of God really breaks through to man, when God becomes himself what man is and assumes man into a binding relation with his own being." But not only is Christ essential, but also the Spirit, "for then the self-giving of God actualises itself in us as the Holy Spirit creates in us the capacity to receive it and lifts us up to participate in the union and communion of the incarnate Son with the heavenly Father."<sup>34</sup> Importantly for Torrance, we know the Spirit not primarily from his economic works but from his relation with the Son (and from the Son's relation with the Father). A doctrine of the Holy Spirit is thus developed from his essential relation to the one God, "and specifically from his inherence in the being of the eternal Son."<sup>35</sup> This principle is crucial for understanding Torrance's doctrine of God and doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Influenced by Athanasius, Torrance formulates his doctrine of the Holy Spirit in a way which is controlled by the prior revelation of the knowledge of the Son and of the Father through the Son.<sup>36</sup> Commenting on Athanasius' theology, Torrance writes:

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<sup>32</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 100.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

Since the Holy Spirit bears the same relation in being and act to God as the Son does to the Father in being *homoousios* with the Father, the Spirit is *homoousios* not only with the Son but with the Father. Moreover, since the Spirit is in himself in accordance with his own nature what he does and bestows upon us from God, he is himself of God and in God and to be confessed as God with the Word; and since the Spirit shares indivisibly with the presence and activity of the Father and the Son in all the acts of the Godhead, he belongs essentially to the divine Triad through an identity of *ousia*.<sup>37</sup>

This lends itself to a “profound objectivity”<sup>38</sup> of the Spirit and the works of the Spirit in the life of the believer and the church. More will be said of this profound objectivity below, suffice to say this is one of the reasons Torrance’s theology lacks a robust pneumatology. The point to be made here is that there is an inherent relation in being and act between the Son and the Spirit; which means to be in the Spirit is to be in the Son, to know the Son is to know the Spirit, and to have the Spirit is to be taken into the sphere of God’s intra-trinitarian communion, whereby:

through the Spirit God is able to take possession of his creatures and to be present to them in such a way that they are lifted up to the level of participation in God where they are opened out for union and communion with God far beyond the limits of their creaturely existence — which is another way of describing *theosis*. To *be* in the Spirit is to *be* in God, for the Spirit is not external but internal to the Godhead; but since it is only the Spirit of God who knows what is in God and it is he who joins us to the Logos in God, through the Spirit we are exalted to know God in his inner intelligible relations as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, yet in such a way that we are restrained by the sheer holiness and majesty of the divine Being from transgressing the bounds of our creaturely being in inquiring beyond what is given through the Son and received by the Spirit, and therefore from thinking presumptuously

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 234.

and illegitimately of God.<sup>39</sup>

Knowledge of the Spirit is only ever first a knowledge of the Son made possible by the Spirit. Adopting the common teaching on the *taxis* of the divine persons, all divine activity is *from* the Father, *through* the Son, and *in* the Holy Spirit such that "The Holy Spirit is the power of God, the *energeia* of the Son, through whom God realizes and actualizes his works."<sup>40</sup> All the economic activity of the Spirit is presupposed by the work of the Son such that "The creative work of the Spirit is, so to speak, proleptically conditioned by that of redemption."<sup>41</sup> Here Torrance's theology of the Trinity is clear, the work of the Spirit is to reveal the Son, to make the Son known, to make the presence of the Son a reality in the lives of believers. Torrance calls this the Spirit's work of objectivity: to be objective is reasoning in accordance with the nature of the object, and ultimately, God is the object of our study. The Spirit creates in individuals a "recovery of complete objectivity" which is only found in coming into contact with the complete transcendence of God, and that is a distinct work of the Spirit. "That is not something we can achieve," writes Torrance, "but we can let it happen."<sup>42</sup>

This prioritizing of the Son is central to Torrance's theology. The Incarnation is the unique "self-objectification of God," that objectivity "takes concrete form in the historical humanity of Jesus Christ, and therefore confronts us historical human beings right in the midst of our objectivities with the very Being and majesty of God himself."<sup>43</sup> In revealing the reality of the Incarnation of the Son and what that means for us and our salvation we find the true objectivity of the work of the Spirit. Torrance rejects all attempts to make the work of the Spirit objective in its own right, as it were, apart from or even distinct from the Son, "for it is in that context that we are not allowed to confound the objective reality of God with our own subjective states, or to resolve it away as the symbolic counterpart of our human

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 238–239.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1996), 216.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 234.

concerns."<sup>44</sup> This, Torrance avers, "is the epistemological relevance of the Holy Spirit:"<sup>45</sup> namely, to make the Son known and to draw all people up, into union with Christ and communion with God.

Torrance's theology is what might be termed a "second article theology," whereby, referencing the creed, the Son is the mediator between God and humanity and hence the Son is the mediator of the Holy Spirit, and all the work of God in the economy is first of all a work of the Son. Consequently, for this type of theologizing, the Son is the centerpiece of theology and the focus of the economic activity of God. As mentioned earlier, for Torrance

The Holy Spirit is not knowable independently in himself, but he is known through the one Word or self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In himself the Spirit hides himself from us by his very mode of Being as Spirit, and effaces himself in his very mode of Activity as Spirit, throwing his eternal Light upon the Father through the Son and upon the Son in the Father.<sup>46</sup>

A second article theology occludes any direct experience or worship of the Spirit by privileging the exclusive worship of the Son. The Spirit is received by the Son in the Incarnation and hence the Son is "both the God who gives and the Man who receives in one Person" and he is in the unique position to "transfer in a profound and intimate way what belongs to us in our human nature to himself and to transfer what is his to our human nature in him."<sup>47</sup> As Torrance states, "That applies above all to the gift of the Holy Spirit whom he received fully and completely in his human nature for us."<sup>48</sup> All subsequent work of the Spirit is an elongation of the work of the Son, so to speak, but parsed out in such a way that it

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 246.

*appears* that human experiences of the Spirit are essentially denied, in favor of humans' experiencing (or simply knowing) Jesus's experience of the Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

The strength of a second article theology is precisely in the focus on the work of the incarnate Son for us and our salvation. The weaknesses of such a theology, however, are seen downstream, when we come to speak of the reality of salvation, the essence of worship, and we attempt to speak in more detail about the spiritually filled and enabled life. Torrance will struggle to meaningfully relate the Holy Spirit to Christian life and experience in any concrete terms, but more of that below.

Torrance's trinitarian theology is rich and compelling. It is canonical and conciliar and offers at every point the possibility of a robust and compelling pneumatology: an account of the identity and mission of the Holy Spirit, especially the Spirit's work in the life and worship of creatures reconciled to God through their union with Christ and communion with the Father. A clear indication of this compelling richness can be found in the following:

There is one Mediator between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to us only through him as the Spirit of Holiness, the Spirit of Redemption, and the Spirit of Glory. He comes to us from the inner life of Jesus as the Spirit in which he gained the victory over sin and temptation, as the Spirit in which he brought the divine holiness to bear upon our flesh of sin, sanctifying and perfecting in himself the very nature which he took from us, and therefore he comes in all the richness of the divine human holiness of Christ. He comes to us from the triumphant obedience and victory of Christ in his Cross and Resurrection, as the Spirit clothed with mighty, redemptive acts transmitting the energy of Christ's risen and glorified Humanity, and as the Spirit of him who has entered into the new life and inherited all the promises of God, and therefore he comes in all the

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<sup>49</sup> Torrance's theology, while not antithetical to more charismatic forms of Christianity, is not inherently charismatic at all. See Alexandra Radcliffe, *The Claim of Humanity in Christ: Salvation and Sanctification in the Theology of T. F. and J. B. Torrance* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

transforming power of the Saviour and Redeemer of men. He comes to us from the whole life of Christ constituted in death and resurrection as the one, all-sufficient and eternal oblation of mankind, as the Spirit in which Christ lifted up our human nature in worship and prayer and adoration to God, in which at last he presented himself in spotless sacrifice to the Father as the Head of Humanity and through this one offering presented us to him as those whom he had perfected in himself. And therefore the Spirit comes as the Spirit of a Manhood wholly offered to God in perpetual glorification and worship and praise.<sup>50</sup>

And yet, there are limitations. The promise of pneumatology is not fulfilled in Torrance's work. The lofty heights Torrance achieves in his Christology are not met when we try to account for a holistic pneumatology and ask how the work of the Spirit is translated into human experience and where one can point to human worship of the Father, Son, *and* Holy Spirit in the Christian life, both individually and corporately. Here we remember Torrance's insistence that:

We recall too that this transference comes from the Holy Spirit, from his own self-effacing nature and office in hiding himself, as it were, behind the Face of the Father in the Son and behind the Heart of the Son in the Father, yet revealing the one Triune God by letting his eternal light shine through himself to us.<sup>51</sup>

And further,

The Holy Spirit is not knowable independently in himself, but he is known through the one Word or self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In himself the Spirit hides himself from us by his very mode of Being as Spirit, and effaces himself in his very mode of Activity as Spirit, throwing his eternal Light upon the Father through the Son and upon the Son in the Father.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 248.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

In the following section Torrance's insistence on the self-effacing nature of the Holy Spirit will be used to identify and discuss the lack of a robust pneumatology in his work and ways in which this might be redressed.

### 3. A Deficient Pneumatology

Having clearly demonstrated that Torrance is a trinitarian, and that he has a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Torrance's deficient pneumatology now requires explanation. Earlier I noted Torrance's commitment to an idea he finds in Athanasius, namely the "profound objectivity" by which "the Holy Spirit ... does not carry with it a concept of psychological inwardness in our experience of him or even a notion of sacramental inwardness."<sup>53</sup> While this safeguards an anthropologizing of the Spirit,<sup>54</sup> it unwittingly removes any affectual or experiential aspect from the Christian life.<sup>55</sup> The mysterious objectivity of the Spirit is a constant refrain in Torrance's work. Spirit

expresses the unapproachableness, the ineffability, the unutterable majesty of God. It is this fact that can never be forgotten in the doctrine of the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, or in the relation of the doctrine of the Spirit to any other doctrine, of God or of his works, and this fact which makes precise and clear-cut statements so difficult.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 234.

<sup>54</sup> Torrance names this as his chief concern when he writes: "One of the major lessons we learn from Athanasius and his attack upon Arians and semi-Arians alike is that unless we know the Holy Spirit through the objectivity of the *homoousion* of the Son in whom and by whom our minds are directed away from ourselves to the one Fountain and Principle of Godhead, then we inevitably become engrossed with ourselves, confusing the Holy Spirit with our own spirits, and confounding the one Truth of God with notions of our own devising. In other words, apart from the indissoluble relation of the Spirit and the Incarnate Son, we are unable to distinguish the objective reality of the Lord God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, from our own subjective states and conditions, or from our own creative spirituality," *Ibid.*, 227, and again at 231.

<sup>55</sup> Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3, takes "affect to be a mode of experience that is tethered to physical bodies and that encompasses emotion, feeling, and desire."

<sup>56</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 210.



And clearly, when it came to the Spirit, Torrance struggled to say much at all. To distill Torrance's teaching to a single point we can say that "the Spirit is not cognoscible in himself."<sup>57</sup> Further, the Spirit "hides himself" and remains incomprehensible:<sup>58</sup> "To be concerned with the Spirit, to know him, to be acted on by him, is immediately to be concerned with the Being or *ousia* of God the Creator."<sup>59</sup> Herein we find a contradiction in Torrance's thought. The Spirit is at once unknowable and knowable, hidden yet revealed, silent and yet communicative, experienced and yet not felt. Torrance's recourse is to say that we come to know, hear, and experience the Spirit only as we come to know, hear, and experience the Son, for the two are *homoousios*, and as the Son is *homoousios to Patri*, this is the way we know the Father too.

In an earlier work I argued that:

Davidson maintains that any reclamation of the theological couplet [*an/en-hypostasis*] must be supplemented with a robust pneumatology in order to specify the relevance of the human Jesus for revelation, salvation, anthropology, ethics and ecclesiology. Davidson is surely correct in this assessment and it is at this point that Torrance's theology is somewhat lacking. In his discussion of *enhypostasia* and *anhypostasia*, and other christological themes, Torrance speaks of the Holy Spirit regularly but fails adequately to incorporate a pneumatological discourse. By positing too great an emphasis on the agency of the divine Word on the human nature of Jesus, as opposed to a relation mediated by the Holy Spirit, Torrance implicitly makes the human nature of Christ merely instrumental. It would be too much to suggest that Torrance's christology is docetic or Apollinarian, but his lack of pneumatology in this area does risk bringing him to the brink of such a failing.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 213. Cf. 37.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 226. The Spirit reveals himself to us "by revealing the Father through the Son."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>60</sup> Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 71.

A robust pneumatology would be evident in a detailed discussion of the incarnational dynamics of Jesus' life, in a study of the cross, in issues of practical theology, and most especially, in detailed discussion of the Christian life.<sup>61</sup> It is this final point which others have recently picked up on, notably Simeon Zahl.

In his work *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, Zahl is concerned to make the connections between theology and experience in the belief, well-founded, that theologians often wax eloquent about the theoretical, ontological, or theological aspects of the Christian life, but rarely if ever actually discuss the experiential aspects of the faith. Zahl holds Torrance up as a prime example of this problem.<sup>62</sup> Specifically, Zahl's charge is that

viewed strictly from the perspective of practice and experience rather than theological "correctness," then, the sum of Torrance's claims is the banal and almost contentless assertion that union with Christ will entail deep unspecified changes in our "being." In its lack of specificity, it risks giving theological cover to all sorts of projection. We can potentially take anything we like and call it a form of "actualising our union and communion with God."<sup>63</sup>

While overstated, I share Zahl's critique. Torrance's premise, noted above, is that theologians should have "nothing to do with any attempt to reach an understanding of the Spirit beginning from manifestations or operations of the Spirit in creaturely existence, in man or in the world."<sup>64</sup> He extends that beyond "beginning manifestations" into any and all manifestations.

Christ, who is *homoousios* with God and man, acts for us in every dimension of salvation, such that our salvation is a participation in his already completed salvation. We share via ontological participation in the finished work of Christ. Notions of ransom, sacrifice, propitiation, expiation, reconciliation, and so forth are

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<sup>61</sup> The two published volumes of Torrance's New College lectures go some way to filling in parts of these details, but even here the treatment is cursory.

<sup>62</sup> See Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, 71–72; 74–75; and 95–101.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. The citations are from Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 201.

retained, but contextualized into the more fundamental scheme of participation. By means of the Holy Spirit, people share in the salvation Christ has achieved. The Spirit is the agent of deification. It is here that Zahl finds Torrance wanting:

But what is such participation like from the perspective of the participant? ... Are there any practically recognizable experiential correlates to this process? Does it change our feelings or desires or cognitions or behaviours? ... Torrance makes no attempt to answer these questions.<sup>65</sup>

Zahl's critique then matches my own above, "From the perspective of a full-orbed pneumatology, this seems a deep weakness in Torrance's account."<sup>66</sup>

There are two possibilities for Torrance's silence, according to Zahl: first, "the work of the Spirit in salvation never affects actual human bodies in time"; or second, "there are experiential correlates of participation, but the task of theologically analyzing or describing them is so laden with problems that it should never be attempted."<sup>67</sup> In my estimation, it is the second of these options that accounts for Torrance's silence. Torrance was petrified, like Barth before him, that the Holy Spirit would be confused for some human spirit, and as such, human ideologies would be projected onto God and read back into political action, as was done by the Third Reich. But even Barth could see that the time was coming (he named the year 2000 as that time), when we could talk about the economy of the Spirit without hopelessly confusing the Holy Spirit with any human spirit.

In his theology, Torrance typically defaults to ontological descriptions of the Christian life as opposed to experiential ones. The Spirit works in the ontological depths of our humanity and existence.<sup>68</sup> This, Zahl argues, amounts to a "rhetorical sleight of hand on the subject of experience."<sup>69</sup> He continues, "From the perspective

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<sup>65</sup> Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, 97.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>68</sup> See Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 181, 155, 156, 159 for examples.

<sup>69</sup> Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, 98.

of pneumatology, this will not do. ... a purely 'invisible' Christianity is one that does not take seriously the reality of the Holy Spirit."<sup>70</sup>

Once again echoing my own conclusions, Zahl writes,

absent any affectively and experientially plausible account of how *theosis* might play out in the world, Torrance's soteriology ends up operating, in practice, at the level of pure conceptuality. It functions as a kind of pneumatological Docetism: it has no real connection to bodies, just the appearance of such a connection.<sup>71</sup>

Zahl concludes, "far from reintegrating experience into theology, Torrance's account of participation simply reestablishes an earlier Protestantism's naïve anti-experientialism on a framework of deification."<sup>72</sup>

#### **4. A Torrancean Pneumatology**

The challenge for Torrance scholars is how to move beyond Torrance without leaving him behind. Zahl's critique is articulate and compelling. We should not, however, throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water. Torrance's work is not invalidated because of such critiques. Rather, what is required is for scholars of Torrance's work to retrieve his crucial insights and then constructively go beyond them in delineating a robust pneumatology that can deliver on the promise of Torrance's work. As Zahl argued, "in order to combat the problem of projection, theologians should seek to draw connections between metaphysical or otherwise abstract dogmatic statements about the status of believers before God in the Spirit and their phenomenological correlates."<sup>73</sup> That is a huge job and one beyond the parameters of a short essay. The contours of such a project can, however, be sketched.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 75. The citations concludes, "and where possible to refuse the distinction entirely." I disagree with this added point; a distinction is still helpful, a separation is not.

Earlier I named Torrance's theology as a species of second article theology, one that is materially focused on the work of the incarnate Son to the exclusion of the distinct (but never separate!)<sup>74</sup> mission of the Holy Spirit. A Third Article Theology (TAT) is an attempt to complement first and second article theologies with an emphasis on the mission of the Spirit in parallel and harmony with the mission of the Son.<sup>75</sup> Where Torrance's work is richly and rightly Christological, TAT would add to such an account an equally rich and textured account of the identity and mission of the Holy Spirit. This could take several forms: where Torrance articulates the life of Christ others could go on and fill that out with an equally articulate account of the life of the Spirit in the life of Christ (a Spirit Christology); where Torrance makes claims for the importance of the Spirit in the Christian life others could go on to specifically speak about what union and communion with God looks like, feels like, and what embodied practices are part of that (*theosis*); and where Torrance limits the sphere of the Spiritual (the work of the Spirit in embodied experience) to the hypothetical and metaphysical, others could speak into a thoroughly practical theology, embedded in human practices and habits, liturgical rites and spiritual formation (a *communio* ecclesiology).

To continue the work of Torrance is not to restate his theology but to retrieve it and then build upon it in ways he did not. As the "personalising person," as Torrance was fond of saying,<sup>76</sup> the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer needs description and analysis. What does an onto-relational concept of person mean for

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<sup>74</sup> "There is no separate activity of the Holy Spirit in revelation or salvation in addition to or independent of the activity of Christ, for what he does is to empower and actualise the words and works of Christ in our midst as the words and works of the Father" – Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 196. There may not be a separate mission of the Spirit but there is a distinction to be made, and while Torrance recognize this (think for example of his appreciative acceptance of Basil's notion of the economic taxis of the Trinity), he does not expend any words in describing the fuller mission of the Holy Spirit as a Third Article Theology is wont to do. What Torrance does tend to do is collapse the mission of the Spirit into the mission of the Son, whereas the obverse is generally true today: many today want to collapse the mission of the Son into the mission of the Spirit!

<sup>75</sup> A comprehensive account of Third Article Theology can be found in Myk Habets, ed., *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016). The genesis of TAT can be traced back to insights of Karl Barth and the seminal work of D. Lyle Dabney.

<sup>76</sup> Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 230, 231, and elsewhere.

human communities? What does it mean to be full of the Spirit and conformed to the image of Christ from glory to glory? How is *theosis* worked out within the locus of gathered communities of faith? Perhaps most acutely, how do we talk about the fact that in Christ we have access to the Father through the Spirit such that we are brought into the Father's presence?<sup>77</sup>

These deeply real and deeply profound theological truths mean a lot and as long as they remain ontological, metaphysical notions, or as long as they remain purely indicative theological statements, they remain aloof and often inaccessible to the apprehension of most Christians.<sup>78</sup> Torrance wrote, as we saw above, of a false objectivity. We need to be aware of a different form a false objectivity can take. Where Torrance only saw the dangers of a false subjectivity, whereby notions of the human spirit or human experience would be projected onto God and read back into the economy, we need to be alert to another form of false objectivity whereby human experiences are entirely removed from the sphere of the Spirit's work. This is where Zahl's work offers a clarion call. While the Spirit remains sovereign over all human experiences, he chooses to work in the lives of embodied spiritual and emotional creatures. I believe this is why Torrance found an epistemological home in a theological form of critical realism, for the very reason that one does not have to deny genuine human experience as a sphere in which God works by his Spirit.<sup>79</sup> As Torrance said, the presence of God the Holy Spirit creates *koinonial* relations and "renews relationships in society."<sup>80</sup> This results in radical reconstruction of entire social networks and communities. These radical *koinonial* implications need to be named, identified, and discussed, otherwise they are theoretical platitudes dislocated from the realities of life.

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<sup>77</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 292.

<sup>78</sup> This fact explains in part the difficulty many find in reading Torrance's work.

<sup>79</sup> See further in Myk Habets, *Theology in Transposition: A Constructive Appraisal of T.F. Torrance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press Academic, 2013), 91–120; and 121–140.

<sup>80</sup> Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 62.

## Conclusion

Simeon Zahl has called on theologians to engage embodied practices of lived experience and not retreat into metaphysical ghettos or abstract theologizing. Torrance's theology is held up as a prime example of how not to do theology (or at least, how not to do practical theology). Zahl's critique, while overdrawn, highlights areas in which those following Torrance could be invited to see the tremendous contribution his theology has made and continue that contribution by adding to it a more practical and grounded application of his theology to life and ministry. We see hints of this already in the recent works of Eric Flett,<sup>81</sup> Joseph Sherrard,<sup>82</sup> Paul Molnar,<sup>83</sup> and Kevin Navarro,<sup>84</sup> and others.<sup>85</sup> It is hoped that an essay like this might be a stimulus to further work beyond Torrance in these and other areas. A robust pneumatology has to flesh out and expand a robust Christology; anything less is a trinitarian diminution.

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<sup>81</sup> Eric G. Flett, *Persons, Powers, and Pluralities: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

<sup>82</sup> Joseph H. Sherrard, *T. F. Torrance as Missional Theologian: The Ascended Christ and the Ministry of the Church* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021).

<sup>83</sup> Paul D. Molnar, *Freedom, Necessity, and the Knowledge of God: In Conversation with Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2022).

<sup>84</sup> Kevin J. Navarro, *Trinitarian Doxology: T.F. and J.B. Torrance's Theology of Worship as Participation by the Spirit in the Son's Communion with the Father* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020).

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, various essays in *Torrance and Evangelical Theology: A Critical Evaluation*, ed. Myk Habets and Lucas Stamps (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2022).