

Outline of *Ground and Grammar* Chapter Six “The Basic Grammar of Theology”

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Thomas F. Torrance, "The Basic Grammar of Theology," in *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University of Virginia Press; Belfast: Christian Journals, 1980), 146-178; [#1980-369g](#)

Torrance begins his reflections on the Trinity in this chapter by stressing first that theological knowledge is scientific in the sense that it “involves knowledge . . . in accordance with the nature of the realities with which we have to do in it,” 146. For him that means to have true knowledge of reality it has to be knowledge of its internal structure and internal relations. As applied to the Trinity of course that means that unless we know God as the triune God and thus as the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit “in terms of God’s inner divine relations,” we do not know God at all. So, he rejects what he calls dualism and also rejects dividing the study of the doctrine of God into the study of God’s oneness which supposedly could be known by reason, and thus by natural theology, and God’s trinity, which can be known only through revelation.

He says Barth himself rejected any natural theology as a “preamble of faith,” as in Roman Catholic theology because that bifurcates knowledge of the one God from knowledge of the Trinity. He also says that’s what happens in “Westminster theology” regarding a “covenant of works” and “a covenant of grace” (148).

Torrance also rejects Augustine’s dualist approach which appeals to “a trinitarian structure that we have in our minds, independent of or apart from our actual knowledge of God,” (148-9). He did this by suggesting we had an image of God in our mind “even apart from [our] participation in God,” (149). Importantly, he says this very mistake occurs in modern theology with a phenomenological or psychological approach. This for Torrance is due to “Augustinian dualism” that needs to be overcome. He notes that this can take three forms: 1) the medieval Thomist, 2) the Aristotelian, the Protestant Newtonian, or the “phenomenological offshoots” (149). There can be little doubt that, among others, he had in mind here were the transcendental Thomists with their non-conceptual knowledge of God and Tillich with his similar view.

He next says that it is an exciting question to consider what is done by Jews who do not believe God is triune. He says Martin Buber faced the question of God in relation to suffering that was forced upon the Jews by the holocaust and “by the experiences of the Israelis in the Holy Land today,” (149). Torrance claims that Buber saw right through the modern Protestant view with its “conceptual letting go of God,” (ibid.) which resulted from Kantian thinking. Kant led people to think we could not know “things in themselves, but only as they appear to us,” and so he eliminated the possibility of knowledge God in his internal relations, which for Torrance means that if one follows his approach there is no real knowledge of God. Indeed, he says, that approach means “we cannot even know Jesus, let alone God, as he is in himself,” (ibid.)

Torrance reiterates that we only know reality when we know it in its internal relations and thus not only as it appears to us “externally.” So, the question then for Buber is: how can he grasp God in a way that does not let go of God conceptually if God is “ineffable” and “unnameable” as in Judaism? Torrance responds by claiming that Buber actually was “covertly trinitarian” in his thinking by appealing to “the relations of love within the Being of God himself” which Torrance says he got from Spinoza who, he says, was influenced by Christianity (150).

Torrance says there is a kind of “love, a profound reciprocity, within God, and it is when our knowledge of God latches on to that internal relationship deep in God that we can really conceive him and know him in accordance with his intrinsic nature,” (150). He says, “that is the ground, as Buber showed, for a conceptual grasp of God,” (ibid.).

Now these assertions are rather amazing given the fact that Torrance’s scientific understanding of God is explicitly grounded in the knowledge of God as the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and only thus knowledge of the love of God in his internal relations. For instance, he says it is only through Jesus Christ the incarnate Son that “we may really know God as he is in himself and in accordance with his nature. But it is on that ground, the same ground where we know the Father through the Son, that we may also know the Spirit, for it is in the Spirit sent to us by the Father through the Son that knowledge of God is mediated and actualised within us” (*Trinitarian Faith*, 203). Therefore, he says, “knowledge of the Spirit as well as of the Father is taken from and is controlled by knowledge of the Son,” (ibid.).

So, the problem here is this: Do we really know God in himself just by latching onto a concept of love that is profoundly reciprocal? Or do we not need to know God as he is eternally as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who loves in freedom? Karl Barth for instance claims

God’s love for us is an overwhelming, overflowing, free love. It speaks to us of the miracle of this love. We cannot say anything higher or better of the “inwardness of God” than that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and therefore that He is love in Himself without and before loving us, and without being forced to love us. And we can say this only in the light of the “outwardness” of God to us, the occurrence of His revelation. It is from this that we have to learn what is the real nature of the love of God for us (CD I/2, 377).

So, I would say Torrance is right to insist that we not let go of God conceptually—but that he needed to be a lot more precise here because the God Torrance had in mind was in fact the eternal Trinity and one does not necessarily know that God simply by reflecting on reciprocal love!!! That could easily end in a form of modalism.

There is a larger question here and that is: do Jews and Christians worship the same God? And the answer to that question is yes. However, there is a further question that cannot be ignored and that is the one that arises sharply in John’s Gospel chapter eight where Jesus is portrayed in conflict with his fellow-Jews who rejected him. He said to them that their father is the devil, the father of lies, and not God their Father, the Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, because they

rejected him and thus rejected the truth!!! His “I am” sayings made things very clear, namely, that acceptance or rejection of him meant acceptance or rejection of the God of Israel.

In any case, Torrance immediately identifies Paul Tillich as the chief example of neo-Protestant theology because his thinking operates with “a nonconceptual relation to God (not a signitive, but only a symbolical, relation to God,” (150). Such knowledge, Torrance says, does not come from “faith in God, but from some aspect of human culture,” (150). He is certainly right about this because Tillich claims that if you do not like the traditional word for God, you can translate it and speak of the depth of your life or of your ultimate concerns and thereby know God!!! More about this later.

Torrance moves on to assert that we can only know God “strictly in accordance with his nature, and in terms of his own internal relations as they become disclosed to us through the incarnation,” (151).

Here he turns to Athanasius to speak of God’s Logos or Word that “inheres in his own Being eternally,” (151). Since it is that Word that has become incarnate in Christ it is “through Christ that we have cognitive access into the Being of God, into his inner divine intelligibility or *Logos*” (151). For Torrance, as for Anselm, this Word is not just “intelligibility or reason” but a form of “rational speech” in which God expresses himself in Word (152).

As God’s own action, Christ is the action of God who is “identical with the eternal decision or election of God,” (152). Because of this we know God “in accordance with his acts of Being” (152). Torrance says dynamic categories are key here just as they also are important in modern science.

This is the switch he says that “process-theology seeks to make, and that must be appreciated as such,” (152).

Because God speaks to us in his Word “there can be no thought knowing God in his mute Being, as it were, apart from his Word, behind the back of his eloquent Reality as God, for there is no such god,” (153).

God’s Being, Torrance insists, is “intrinsically active, dynamic Being” because God is “not Being which also acts, but Being which acts precisely as Being,” (153).

Torrance here contrasts our knowing God with science in its knowledge of nature and says that “nature is dumb: it cannot talk to us,” (153). We are the ones who have to “turn its mute signals into word and bring its inner patterns and structures to expression” with our theories and laws.

While it is tempting to make nature say what we want it to say, we devise ways of obstructing ourselves from imposing our views on nature (153).

When, in theological science, we “direct our questions” to God “whose very Being is eloquent with Word” we encounter God as the living and creative God who reveals himself to us by creating in us “the capacity to receive and apprehend him,” (154). Torrance says God actually

lifts us up “so that we are given to share in the mutual knowing of the Father and Son in the Holy spirit and thus to know God as he is in himself in the immanent relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (154).

Clearly, Torrance has a firm, clear, and accurate view of the immanent Trinity as the basis for scientific theology. And he immediately follows this clear statement with another extremely important one—one that is frequently overlooked by contemporary theologians. He says God reveals himself to us “where we are in our error and wrong and sin, in our misunderstanding and self-centeredness” so that he strikes “into the very heart of our being” and turns us “inside out” so that he can redeem us from sin and “reconcile us to himself, and assimilate us into the communion of love in his triune Being,” (154).

Torrance often uses that word “assimilate” for our relations with God. I’m not thrilled with that word because if you did not understand exactly how Torrance was using it you might think he was confusing us with God by means of assimilation by being absorbed into God. That is not what he means of course—he means it is through union with Christ that have communion with the Trinity.

God in his revelation Torrance says takes the initiative by turning our questions upside down and that is very different from what occurs in natural science; for listening to the living God and listening to nature are two very different things (154).

Since God is and remains Lord in our knowing him, we are “called to think of and to know him, **not from a center in ourselves**, but **from a center in God**, in such a way that it cuts across the grain of our natural desires” and creatively reorients our “mental habits,” (155, emphasis mine). Again, Torrance stresses to critical points that are often ignored or overlooked today, namely, that we can only know God through his own self-revelation and that revelation includes his act of reconciling us to himself through his incarnate Word (155). When this happens Torrance says then “our rational understanding takes on the imprint of what it is given to know, the triune Reality of God himself,” (155).

But what does it mean to know God for Torrance? It means we know him because he lifts us out of ourselves “until we know him and love him and enjoy him in his eternal Reality as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in such a way that the Trinity enters into the fundamental fabric of our thinking of him and constitutes the basic grammar of our worship and knowledge of the One God.” Here we have the theme of the book. The ground and grammar of theology is found in knowledge the Father through his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit (155).

At this point in the book Torrance says he’s not concerned with the content of this knowledge so much as with the way we know God through the “stratified structure on the ground of God’s self-revelation to us—which is the actual ground on which our knowledge of God arises,” (156).

What is that structure? First, Torrance says “we have our basic level of experience and worship, in which we encounter God’s revealing and reconciling activity in the Gospel,” (156). He calls this the “*evangelical and doxological level*,” (156). Second, he says that we have the

“*theological level*” in which we direct our attention to God as he is as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He says these distinctive personal ways of being are more than just modes of being because “the mode is inseparable from the reality of which it is the distinctive mode, or way of being—Father, Son, or Holy Spirit,” (157). He says he is here referring to the economic Trinity, that is, to God’s communications with us in space and time “in which he remains what he is eternally in himself while communicating himself to us really and truly and without reserve in Jesus Christ and in his Spirit,” (157).

Few theologians today are as clear about this as Torrance is. And without clarity hear theology itself becomes inaccurate and problematic.

Finally, he comes to the third level. Anyone paying attention to Torrance’s writings will note that these three levels were also discussed in his book, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons*, 1996. The third level is what he calls the higher scientific level.

Here we move “from the level of economic trinitarian relations in all that God is toward us in his self-revealing and self-giving activity to the level in which we discern the trinitarian relations immanent in God himself which lie behind, and are the ground of the relations of, the Economic Trinity,” (158). Torrance’s thinking here is extremely important since so many today end up collapsing the immanent into the economic Trinity or separating the two as in various “dualisms.”

Here Torrance makes a statement that is frequently repeated in his writings, namely, that “what God is toward us in the three-fold economic activity of his revelation and redemption, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he is antecedently and eternally in his own Being in the Godhead” (158). He makes another important point, namely, that while we move from a lower to a higher level from the economic to the immanent Trinity epistemologically, the fact is that the immanent and economic Trinity “are identical.” But he does not mean this in exactly the same way Rahner and others mean this, when they end up conceptualizing our relations with God in a mutually conditioned way such as when Rahner claims that natural theology and revealed theological mutually condition each other and that Christology and anthropology also do so. Torrance would have none of that. He only means that “there is only one divine Reality of God in himself and in his saving and revealing activity toward us in this world,” (ibid.).

This is extremely important material. Torrance stresses that Gregory Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria and Athanasius identified the Trinity “in this ultimate ontological sense . . . with the subject matter of theology par excellence” saying that “in the strictest sense the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is *theologia*, that is theology in its purest form, the pure science of theology, or *episteme dogmatike*,” (158).

Torrance then says he likes to think of the doctrine of the Trinity as the “*ultimate ground* of theological knowledge of God, the *basic grammar* of theology, for it is there that we find our knowledge of God reposing upon the final Reality of God himself, grounded in the ultimate relations intrinsic to God’s own Being,” (158-9). This, he says, governs and controls “all true knowledge of [God] from beginning to end,” (158).

Think about this in relation to other popular views that are out there.

Listen to Tillich—it is a disaster because his view of God is grounded in us and not in the eternal Trinity.

“Today . . . the so-called ‘psychology of depth’ . . . leads us from the surface of our self-knowledge into levels where things are recorded which we knew nothing about on the surface of our consciousness . . . It can help us to find the way into our depth, although it cannot help us in an ultimate way, because it cannot guide us to the deepest ground of our being and of all being, the depth of life itself. The name of this infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being is *God*. That depth is what the word *God* means. And if that word has not much meaning for you, translate it, and speak of the depths of your life, of the source of your being, of your ultimate concern, of what you take seriously without any reservation. Perhaps, in order to do so, you must forget everything traditional that you have learned about God, perhaps even that word itself. For if you know that God means depth, you know much about Him. You cannot then call yourself an atheist or unbeliever. For you cannot think or say: Life has no depth! Life itself is shallow. Being itself is surface only. If you could say this in complete seriousness, you would be an atheist; but otherwise you are not. He who knows about depth knows about God,” Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*, pp. 56-7.

Listen to Rahner.

Transcendental theology “must develop in a general ontology and anthropology an a priori doctrine of the God-Man, and in this way try to construct the conditions which make possible a genuine capacity to hear the historical message of Jesus Christ . . .”<sup>1</sup>

For Rahner, the *supernatural existential* means that “it belongs to the very essence of concrete human nature to be called to grace, to be able to find God in the particularities of all history . . . the history of salvation and revelation are coextensive with the history of the human race . . .”<sup>2</sup> Thus, “the offer and the possibility of grace is given with human nature itself as . . . historically constituted . . . the supernatural existential wants to affirm something about the reality of grace, namely, that it is a constituent part of our historical human existence.”<sup>3</sup> Torrance would flatly reject this overt confusion of nature and grace because it clearly detaches grace from Christ the giver of grace and ends up with Rahner’s view of anonymous Christianity which Torrance would also flatly reject. It also leads Rahner to the problematic conclusion that “Anyone therefore, no matter how remote from any revelation formulated in words, who accepts his existence, that is, his humanity . . . in quiet patience, or better, in faith, hope and love—no matter what he calls them . . . such a one says yes to something which really is such as his boundless confidence

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<sup>1</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 176-77.

<sup>2</sup> Dych, *A World of Grace*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 36-7.

hopes it to be . . . Anyone who accepts his own humanity in full . . . has accepted the son of Man . . .” (TI 4: 119).

Additionally, Rahner says, “There may be many who face up to life bravely . . . yet who do not regard themselves as believers at all. But . . . in their calm acceptance of their lives they actually achieve, implicitly and in principle, what the conscious and professed believer does explicitly,” Karl Rahner, (TI 7:223). See also Rahner, TI 5:12f. In this sense Christianity is present in everyone in an incipient state. This is called “**anonymous Christianity.**” The key problem here is that Rahner now presents us with a Christianity without Christ based on his nonconceptual knowledge of God and of revelation!!

And what about Catherine LaCugna who says that ‘*theologia* is not the Trinity *in se* but, much more modestly and simply, the mystery of God . . . an “*immanent*” *trinitarian theology of God is nothing more than a theology of the economy of salvation.*’<sup>4</sup> Further, “*theologia* is not the Trinity *in se*, but, much more modestly and simply . . . the mystery of God with us . . . . The life of God is not something that belongs to God alone. *Trinitarian life is also our life . . . .* The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about “God” but a teaching about *God’s life with us and our life with each other.*”<sup>5</sup>

And Sallie McFague refers to God’s activity in relationship to the world and our talk about that activity that she “makes no claims about the so-called immanent . . . trinity, for I see no way that assumptions concerning the inner nature of God are possible. My interest centers on the economic trinity, on the experience of God’s activity in relation to the world.”<sup>6</sup> Having said this, she makes it clear that her view of God as mother, lover and friend has nothing at all to do with the God of the Nicene faith!! So, the truth is that she has said nothing true about either the economic or the immanent Trinity with her models of God.

Torrance could not be clearer. Theological science allows its knowledge to move from an encounter with Christ since with him we are “face to face” with God and through and with Christ they knew God the Father because they were in union with God through union with Christ (159).

Torrance insists it is because of the hypostatic union that we can truly refer epistemically to God as he truly is. To know God then means “an actual sharing on our part—through the Communion of the Spirit, who dwells immanently both in the Father and in the Son—in the unique and closed mutuality not only of knowing and loving but also of being between the Father and the Son,” (160). It is precisely because Father and Son are *homoousios* that the relation between the incarnate Son and the Father falls within this world and within the very life and being of God, with the result that in “our relations with Jesus Christ we have to do directly with the ultimate Reality of God,” (160)

The *homoousion* “is the ontological and epistemological linchpin of Christian theology,” (160-1).

Notice that these crucial claims are either completely missing, ignored or directly rejected in the remarks to the theologians mentioned above. McFague, for instance, insists that Jesus is not ontologically different from any key figure in history who manifests God’s love because he is a

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<sup>4</sup> LaCugna, *God For Us*, 223-24, emphasis mine.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 222-24 and 228.

<sup>6</sup> McFague, *Models of God*, 224.

paradigmatic example of God's love but is not unique (*Models of God*, 136). She says he is our historical choice as our Christian foundational figure!

Here Torrance repeats his assertion that what God is toward us he is in himself because what Jesus is toward us as God acting in space and time as revealer and savior in his grace and love enables Torrance to claim that knowing God as he is in Christ is what grounds our theology in God himself because in him we are raised up "to share in his own divine life and love which [God] eternally is in himself," (161). He does not have to make the absurd statement here that *trinitarian life is our life* because that remains God's life and it is through the mediation of Christ that we are drawn by God through his Spirit into a genuine relation with the eternal Trinity and thus to a participation in his eternal love through union with Christ.

Torrance next moves to an interesting discussion of Kant. These are extremely important ideas because he claims that unless we know reality in its internal relations, then all we do is operate with symbols which we use to organize observational data. So, he says "if nature is not in itself that which we claim to know of it in its relations toward us, then we do not really know nature," (162).

He says Einstein's scientific approach broke through Kantian phenomenalism because he grounded the "objective intelligibility of the universe" in an "inherent relatedness" grounded independently of our perceptions and conceptions (162). He even says this "may be called the *homoousion* of physics!), the basic insight that our knowledge of the universe is not cut short at appearances or what we can deduce from them, but is a grasping of reality in its ontological depths," (162).

Torrance says this represents "an epistemological revolution of very far-reaching significance for natural science," (ibid.).

Then he makes another crucial point, namely, that one's movement of thought in physics "does not allow us to project appearances, as such, back into things in themselves," (162-63). His point here is absolutely vital when he carries this point into his theology of the Trinity because here, he says, "the *homoousion* of physics involves a critical operation in which we discover what not to read back into things in themselves," (163).

I say this is a crucial point in his theology because he directly applies this point many times in his theology to the relation of the immanent and economic Trinity. Here he says the *homoousion* "of theology" does not "allow us indiscriminately to read back into God all that we know of Jesus in the flesh, for that could easily lapse into some form of mythological projection into God of what is human and finite," (163).

One key example here will suffice. In contrast to Barth's having read subordination back into the immanent Trinity in CD IV/1, 201, Torrance insists, with Calvin, that "The *principium* of the Father does not import an ontological priority, or some *prius aut posterius* in God, but has to do only with a 'form of order' . . . of inner trinitarian relations governed by the Father/Son relationship, which in the nature of the case is irreversible," Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 66. He noted that for Calvin "the subordination



of Christ to the Father in his incarnate and saving economy cannot be read back into the eternal personal relations and distinctions subsisting in the Holy Trinity. The mediatorial office of Christ does not detract in any way from his divine Majesty,” *ibid.*, 66-7. Thus, “the Father is the fountain of Deity with respect, not to Being, but to order,” *ibid.*, 71. Here Torrance prevents any sort of subordination of the Son to the Father or the Spirit to the Father and Son within the eternal Trinity since that would undermine the very being and act of God as one being, three persons. All those contemporary views that read the missions back into the processions supposedly in order to give full reality to the human Jesus miss this crucial point.

Torrance insists in all his writings on the Trinity that we must not project either logical necessities into the eternal being of the Trinity or “our own subjectivities,” (*Ground and Grammar*, 163) which would confound “God known by us with our knowing of him,” (163). We must distinguish our subjective states from objective reality.

He goes on to discuss our proper analogical knowledge of God grounded in Christ as a kind of “imageless” knowledge of God. That means that “our anthropomorphic images are critically controlled by the objective, intelligible relations in God himself,” (164) and thus we work so that we can avoid projecting our images mythologically into God.

Then he speaks about the Holy Spirit noting that the Holy Spirit is “of the same being as the Giver [Christ the giver of the gift of sanctification] and not some gift detached from God or some created emanation from him. The communion with God that the Holy Spirit is toward us—as through Christ he gives us access in himself to God—he is in his own Being as God,” (164-5).

So, for Torrance, Christ, as the incarnate Word or Son is the “epistemic bridge” for us “between man and God that is grounded both in the Being of God and in the being of man,” (165). That is the significance of the hypostatic union. Christ is thus “the epistemological center in all our knowledge of God,” (165). And it is therefore only by reference to Christ that we can clarify our knowledge of the Spirit,” (165). This is another monumentally important point that is missed by those who think they can discern the Holy Spirit from human works of kindness instead for from knowledge of God as he frees us from sin to know him truly through his incarnate Word in the Word’s union with the Spirit.

Torrance then says the Spirit is “God of God but not man of man, so that our knowledge of the Holy Spirit rests directly on the ultimate objectivity of God as God, unmediated by the secondary objectivities of space and time through which God is revealed in the Son,” (165). Thus, knowledge of the Spirit “rests only indirectly on those objectivities through relation to the Son with whom he is of one Being as he is with the Father,” (165-6). Torrance’s trinitarian theology here, as elsewhere, is first-rate. He rightly claims that the agent of our knowledge of God is the Spirit who also enables us to receive and understand revelation “although he is not the Word of that revelation or the Form which that revelation assumes,” (166).

This is another great point because it prevents the mistaken view of S. Mark Heim when he writes that “God will in crucial measure conform God’s relation with the person to the person’s choice of terms on which to relate with God,” (S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Eerdmans, 2001), 268. This assertion just misses everything that is important in a properly functioning doctrine of the Trinity as presented here by Torrance because Torrance insists all along the line that our knowledge of God is grounded in God’s knowledge of us in Christ and through his Spirit and not at all in any of our choice of terms for relating to God as we might imagine God to be, apart from an explicit recognition of God in Christ. This also eliminates the view of Ruben Rosario Rodriguez that “God is encountered in history *in* works of justice, compassion, and liberation, even when the locus of this spiritual work is a body politic not historically associated with any religion whose members describe their emancipatory work without appealing to explicitly theological language,” (*Dogmatics After Babel*, [Westminster John Knox, 2018]), 176. From this he concludes that “*wherever* the work of establishing justice, extending compassion, and facilitating human liberation occurs, *there* is the true Spirit of God,” (*ibid.*) No. One cannot know the true Spirit of God apart from Christ himself since the Spirit is *homoousios* with the Son. The true Spirit of God

always unites us to Christ and thus to the freedom for God that we have in and through him alone; that is why one cannot simply discern the Holy Spirit by looking at our human works.

Against this thinking Torrance explicitly claims that “it is through holding constantly in our thought the inseparable unity between the economic activity of God in the Spirit and his economic activity in the Son that we may be prevented from reading back into God himself the material or pictorial images that arise out of the reciprocity he has established with us through the incarnation of his Son in space and time, for through the oneness of the Son and the Spirit the iconic images of God in the Son are made to refer imagelessly to God,” (166).

Here Torrance stresses that while we really know God in his internal relations, God remains ineffable to us so that “it would be sheer theological sin to think of identifying the trinitarian structures of our thought and speech of God with the constitutive relations in the Being of the Godhead,” (167). All our concepts fall short of God because they don’t have their truth in themselves but only in God.

Thus, Torrance does not merely advocate some sort of negative theology here because he thinks we cannot know what God is not unless we first know who and what God is as he is for us in his Word and Spirit.

Now Torrance returns to his three levels of thought which begin with ordinary experience and then move toward a scientific theory and finally toward “a higher ‘logical’ unity with a minimum of concepts and relations,” (168-9). He relies on Einstein once again for this analysis.

Then he spends time explaining how these three levels relate with each other and how we can really know things as they are. He then applies this scientific approach to the Trinity (172ff.)

In a manner similar to the way science works, Torrance says we can enter into “the inner relations of the Word and Act of God in Jesus Christ himself” so as to “get the basic clues to our movement of thought from level to level,” (172). Here we use new ideas that are indeed “freely created” but they are freely created “under the impact of God’s self-revelation,” (172). Those words are: “*hypostatic union* and *homoousion*” as well as “*perichoresis*,” (172). While these categories help us understand the Trinity, they cannot be converted into some sort of logical necessity that we project back into God (173).

So, he says we start our knowledge from Jesus Christ and his revelation to us and then move from the economic to the immanent Trinity to speak of the “mutual interpenetration of the three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in one God” so that “once *perichoresis* is refined and changed [from Christology] to apply to the Trinity . . . it can no longer be applied to Christology at the lower level, to express the union between the divine and the human natures in Christ, without serious damage to the doctrine of Christ,” (173). He says whenever that has been done, then “docetic rationalizing and depreciation of the humanity of Christ” follows (173).

Here he says *perichoresis* leads to the “onto-relational concept of the divine Persons” which gives us a new concept of persons “unknown in human thought until then,” (173).

Torrance’s “new” view of person he says, “is not logically derived” as in Western Catholic and Protestant thought by focusing on the “individualization of rational nature,” (Boethius) (174-5). Instead, it is “ontologically derived from the Communion of Being in Love in God himself,” (174). This view follows from Richard of St. Victor in the twelfth century and came to us through Duns Scotus and Calvin.

This new concept of person affects both our view of God and of culture Torrance says (174). But he says we find this to be difficult. It is not difficult in itself but, for us, because of “long-ingrained habits of mind and speech with which we are beset in the Latin-Greek tradition of Western culture,” (174).

Torrance says for other cultures such as the Bantu it is quite natural to think “in relational ways, so

that the concept of onto-relational thought” would not be difficult for them (174). He then connects this better view with modern science in its move from “particle theory” to “quantum theory,” (175).

Torrance then gives an example of an exchange of ideas he had with a physicist from London who turned to Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist thought in order to properly conceive of particles in relational terms. He says he pointed out to him that “the relational thinking of Hindu and Buddhist thought is not correlated with the empirical realities of nature, and indeed cannot be; so that relational thinking of that kind would hardly be appropriate for physics,” (175-6). He says it would be better to take a lesson from the *perichoretic* view of the “mutual coinherence of the Persons of the Holy Trinity,” (176). He does say this cannot be directly correlated with physics. However, since this arose from the relations disclosed in the incarnate Son, it does remain “indirectly” connected with the way God meets us in the economy.

He thinks that in this way Christian theology can be helpful to natural science (176). All he wants to say is that both natural science and theological science operate in a stratified way “within the same rational patterns of space and time” so that while they move in different directions by virtue of their different subject-matters, they do “overlap,” (177).

Finally, as the chapter comes to a close, Torrance mentions the seminar on the Trinity in which he and others considered Rahner’s essay on the Trinity (177). He says theologians from various Christian traditions reached a “remarkable unity” (177) in which the views of “Barth and Rahner were brought together on a patristic basis,” (178). You can see the results of this in his *Trinitarian Perspectives*. In that piece, it is important to note that Torrance was not without his criticisms of Rahner’s approach.

He ends the chapter and the book with optimism that if we think properly about God and us in relational ways we can provide a theology that might “change the foundations of modern life and culture, and the kind of theology that can support the message of the Gospel to mankind, as, in touch with the advances of natural science, theology comes closer and closer to a real understanding of the creation as it came from the hand of God,” (178).