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**CONFLICTING VISIONS OF GRACE AND NATURE:
APPRAISING THE VIEWS OF THOMAS F. TORRANCE AND KARL RAHNER**

Paul D. Molnar, Ph.D.

Professor of Systematic Theology

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

St. John's University, Queens, NY 11439 USA

molnarp@stjohns.edu

Among contemporary theologians, few are as clear or as consistent as T. F. Torrance in asserting and maintaining that grace, as he put it following St. Paul, is "actualised among men in the person of Jesus Christ."¹ Invariably, Torrance insists that grace cannot be detached from the Giver of grace, that is, from Jesus Christ himself. This simple statement has profound and wide-ranging implications. Torrance insists that grace is not "something which merely comes to the assistance of man in his own efforts for righteousness."² Instead, it is "the will of God to constitute man's life afresh on a wholly new basis and in a renewed world, to set him free from sin and Satan; to endue him with the Spirit, to make him the possessor of a supernatural life."³ Among other things, Torrance noted that for Paul grace, as the gift of God, "is none other than the risen Christ who confronts men

¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 30. This volume was first published by Oliver and Boyd in 1948 and was Torrance's doctoral thesis written under the guidance of Karl Barth.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

through the word of his Gospel. *Charis* is not here, therefore, in any sense a quality adhering to Paul, but a particular manifestation of the gracious purpose and power of Christ."⁴ For Paul grace, which is "the new supernatural order which breaks in upon men, but which manifests itself in their faith and in their Christian life," cannot be understood as "a transferred quality."⁵ In other words, Torrance rejects any idea of infused grace. For Torrance, "Grace is not something that can be detached from God and made to inhere in creaturely being as 'created grace'."⁶ This is the case because grace is identical with Christ himself as the active giver of grace.⁷

For Torrance, "Grace means the primary and constitutive act in which out of free love God has intervened to set our life on a wholly new basis, but also means that through faith this may be actualised in flesh and blood because it has been actualised in Jesus Christ."⁸ In his cross and resurrection, Jesus Christ becomes "our salvation, our righteousness, and our wisdom. Thus any attempt to detach grace in a transferred sense from the actual embodiment of God's grace in Jesus Christ is to misunderstand the meaning of the Pauline *charis* altogether."⁹ For Paul, Torrance insists, grace [*charis*] is not some energizing principle as it came to be understood due to Hellenistic influences in later Christian writings.

⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, "The Roman Doctrine of Grace from the Point of View of Reformed Theology," *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 182.

⁷ See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988; reissued in a Second Edition in the Cornerstone Series with a New Critical Introduction by Myk Habets, 2016), 24 and 140-41 and *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); reissued in a Second Edition in the Cornerstone Series with an Introduction by Paul D. Molnar, 2016), 21, 147. Because the Spirit cannot be separated from the Word, the gift of grace cannot be separated from the Holy Spirit either as the one who enables knowledge of the Father through his Son.

⁸ Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace* 33.

⁹ Ibid. Torrance adds: "To detach grace from the person of Christ and to think of it as acting impersonally upon man is inevitably to land in determinism. That was Augustine's mistake", *ibid.*

Rejecting this Hellenistic approach, Torrance opposed the idea that grace could be understood as “a detachable and transferable divine quality which may inhere in or be possessed by the human being to whom it is given in virtue of which he is somehow ‘deified’ or ‘divinised’.”¹⁰ Torrance therefore rejects translating *theosis* as “deification” because he thinks that suggests a change in human nature. So he prefers to translate 2 Peter 1:4 to say we are “partners of the Deity” but not “partakers of divine nature.”¹¹ Understood in a properly Christological and trinitarian way, there is no confusion of divine and human nature or divine and human activity because it is through our personal union with Christ that we share in his humanity, which is uniquely united to his deity by virtue of the hypostatic union. Thus, we are “partakers of the divine nature” through union with Jesus Christ.¹² In this context, Torrance thought Athanasius’s statement that “He [the Word] became man in order to make us divine” was problematic. Noting that Georges Florovsky himself admitted that “The term *theosis* is indeed embarrassing” if it is conceptualized “in ‘ontological categories’” because “man simply cannot become ‘god’,” he preferred, with Florovsky, to understand *Theosis* as “a personal encounter. It is the ultimate intercourse with God, in which the whole of human existence is, as it were, permeated by the Divine Presence.”¹³ Nonetheless, Torrance consistently rejected notions of “divinization” and “deification” to the extent that they implied confusion of Creator and creatures precisely by thinking of “grace as deifying man or heightening his being until he attains the level of a supernatural order” because this view “appears to do docetic violence to creaturely human nature.”¹⁴

Instead, for Torrance, “Christ Himself is the objective ground and content of *charis* in every instance of its special Christian use.”¹⁵ In the New Testament, grace (*charis*) “refers to the being and action of God as revealed and actualised in Jesus

¹⁰ Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 140.

¹¹ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 95.

¹² See Thomas F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church Vol. I, Order and Disorder* (Eugene, OR Wipf and Stock, 1996), 110.

¹³ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 96.

¹⁴ Torrance, “The Roman Doctrine of Grace,” *Theology in Reconstruction*, 180.

¹⁵ Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace*, 21.

Christ, for He is in His person and work the self-giving of God to men ... Grace is in fact identical with Jesus Christ in person and word and deed ... neither the action nor the gift is separable from the person of the giver, God in Christ.”¹⁶ The connection between Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity is crucial in understanding Torrance’s view of grace. Because Torrance thinks God is the content of his revelation to us in Christ, he maintains that “In Jesus Christ the Giver of grace and the Gift of grace are one and the same, for in him and through him it is none other than God himself who is savingly and creatively at work for us and our salvation.”¹⁷ Because God is the one who is savingly present in Christ, that also means that “The Holy Spirit is no less than the Son the self-giving of God, for in him the divine Gift and the divine Giver are identical. This is why the *homoousion* was applied to the understanding of the nature and identity of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ For these reasons, Torrance insisted that grace is never to be conceptualized as “a created medium between God and man” since as God’s self-giving “in his *incarnate* Son in whom the Gift and Giver are indivisibly one” grace itself is “governed by the oneness of the Father and the Son” and therefore grace “cannot be regarded as a detachable and transferable divine quality which may inhere in or be possessed by the human being to whom it is given in virtue of which he is somehow ‘deified’ or ‘divinised’.”¹⁹

With these important nuances and distinctions, Torrance could consistently maintain that our true humanity as it is in Christ is not dissolved in any way but intensified by being exalted in Christ to “share in God’s life and glory.”²⁰ However, because Torrance’s Christology and trinitarian theology function seamlessly together, Torrance insisted that it is through the Holy Spirit and not through anything we find in ourselves, such as our moral sense or our acts of will, that we know God and participate objectively in God. When thinking of our sharing in God’s

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 138

¹⁸ Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 147.

¹⁹ Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 140.

²⁰ Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998; reissued in Cornerstones Series with an Introduction by Paul D. Molnar, 2019), 135.

life and glory eschatologically Torrance held that even now, we experience "communion in the consummated reality which will be fully actualized in us in the resurrection and redemption of the body."²¹ That means at our resurrection, we will not be transformed into another nature but that our human nature will become "imperishable." The point here, however, is that Torrance noted that in considering these matters, there is what he called "the danger of 'vertigo'," because people tend to conceptualize this participation in the divine nature by identifying their own being with God's being in mystical or pantheistic fashion. Torrance adamantly opposes any such thinking because it would destroy the historical connection between the resurrection, ascension, and the historical Jesus as the one point in history where we have communion with the triune God and have hope for Christ's promised eternal life. Torrance thus held that "we share in the life of God while remaining what we were made to be, men and not gods."²²

Torrance's rejection of infused grace is no small matter because it connects decisively with his view of truth. Specifically, Torrance insists that God "is himself the truth who reveals himself as he is and who remains faithful to what he reveals of himself."²³ Put bluntly, for Torrance, truth must be understood "as the truth which God is in his own eternal being, and the truth which he shines upon us from and through himself."²⁴ Following this line of thought, which he held was fundamental to patristic and early medieval theology, Torrance then maintains that

Face to face with God, we are up against the ultimate truth of being in God's own self: it is only as we are cast upon him in this way, as the ultimate source of all truth who is not closed to us but who by his nature is open to us, that we may know him truly, for then, we know him under the immediate compulsion of his own being, in the power of his self-evidence.²⁵

²¹ Ibid., 136.

²² Ibid.

²³ Thomas F. Torrance, "Truth and Authority: Theses on Truth," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 39 (3) (September 1972): 215-42, 224.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

I mention Torrance's discussion of our knowledge of God as truth here to show exactly why it is such a major problem to conceptualize grace as infused grace. Torrance firmly maintains that theology, and in particular, knowledge of God and God's grace, can only be properly understood when *the truth of being* shapes our thinking. This means that we know God's being when in Christ, and through his Spirit, God makes himself known to us. We do not just know something about God metaphorically. We really know God in his eternal being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in faith. That means truth, as the truth of God, is grounded only in God and not in us and that if truth is condensed to what is conceptualized by us, then Kant's disjunction between idea and reality could not be overcome. The important point then is if grace is properly conceived, then there would be substantial agreement between Catholics and Protestants about the truth of who God is in himself and for us and who we are in Christ. That agreement would be reached based on *the truth of being* itself rather than being based on either our moral sense or our faith or our act of will or some external authority other than God himself. Understanding truth as grounded in the being of God rather than in us or some other external authority needs some explanation.

Torrance helpfully explains what he means here by contrasting the views of Thomas Aquinas and Anselm. He begins by noting that for Anselm, "when we really know God we know that we know him under the compulsion of his being who he is and what by his nature he must be."²⁶ We thus know God truly "under the light of his truth which is his divine being coming to view and becoming in our understanding and knowledge of him what he is consistently in himself and in all his relations with us."²⁷ To clarify matters, Torrance here distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary objects of knowledge. The former refers to some object without will, such as one's hand. A hand is an object simply by being what it is. This object compels me to know it as it actually is precisely by being what it is. However, the latter refers to personal agents who can only be known to the extent that they allow themselves to be known to us by freely and willingly giving themselves to be known. Thus, knowledge in this case for medieval theologians involved "willing

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

consent” because it involved “a moment of the will.”²⁸ In this regard, Torrance refers to Duns Scotus to stress that even though such a moment of will is involved in others and in our knowledge of God and others, whenever that other reveals himself to me, “my mind still falls under the compulsion of what is there—and it is that which is finally compelling, and finally self-evidencing.”²⁹

Torrance states that it is the second point that is either omitted or forgotten in Thomist thought. He says that St. Thomas taught “that that to which the understanding gives assent does not move the understanding by its own power but by the influence of the will” so that our intellect is not sufficiently moved to assent “by its proper object, but through an act of choice, i.e. because it is enough to move the will but not enough to move the understanding.”³⁰ This is an important point because Torrance is here claiming that basing knowledge on choice or will detaches our understanding of the truth of God “even in the assent of faith, from the self-evidence of God in his own being and truth.” Such a problematic approach means that faith then must rest on “moral grounds and operate only with an indirect relation to the *autousia* and *autexousia* of God.”³¹ And the key problem here is that this move creates a division between faith and the object of faith which then “is occupied by an *authority other than the truth of being*.”³² That authority of course is filled by one’s human act of will through some imagined infusion of grace. Torrance even wonders whether there is an element of “voluntarism” in Thomas’s view of knowledge of God that would open the door to a kind of nominalism which Thomas certainly opposed theoretically.

Torrance’s key point here, however, is crucial because he is claiming that this gap between faith and the being and action of God himself in his grace in Jesus Christ became the basis of Kant’s separation of faith and its object. That encouraged the view that,

²⁸ Ibid., 225.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

because of the alleged non-evidence of its object [since we only know phenomena and not the noumenal] faith was moved to assent through the will, so that its understanding of God was made to rest on moral grounds. But once a gap is opened up in this way between the understanding and its proper object and the will is allowed to move in to assist the understanding in giving assent, then sooner or later some form of the active intellect or active reason comes on the scene and there takes place a shift in the basic notion of truth.³³

What then was that shift, and what was the result with regard to grace and knowledge of the truth of God through his self-revelation? Torrance's answer is instructive. He says this shift led to the idea that truth came to be understood more as the connection between our understanding and our intellect than as a connection between our intellect and reality itself. This shift in thinking, Torrance believes, occurred in medieval thought and can be seen today in both Protestant and Catholic thought. Torrance maintains that this approach to knowledge of the truth finally suggests that we are the ones who "control and manipulate what we know, and as Kant used to say, make it the object of our thought."³⁴ He notes that in Roman Catholic thought, this thinking can be seen in "Roman phenomenological theology, in which theology tends to be converted into some form of theological

³³ Ibid., 226.

³⁴ Ibid.

anthropology.”³⁵ Torrance further states that, in his view, “the movement in Roman theology from Maréchal to Rahner which brings St Thomas and Kant together, instead of overcoming Kantian phenomenalism serves rather to bring out the latent phenomenalism in Aquinas, and thus accentuates the retreat from the truth of being.”³⁶ This problematic attempt to bring St Thomas and Kant together in this way is an enormously important point because Torrance thinks the transcendental Thomists did indeed retreat from the truth of being by grounding their theology in transcendental experience.

Here it is worth considering Torrance’s critique of transcendental Thomism as it relates to his understanding of truth and, thus, of God’s grace. He says if we follow Anselm’s approach, which held that faith cannot know the being of God without concepts, then theology would operate properly by allowing *the truth of being* rather than our moral acts or acts of will to shape our understanding of the truth of God and God’s grace. That is why he believes that when the truth of being

³⁵ Ibid. Rahner’s theology certainly fits into that category as he claims that “The question of man and its answering may not be regarded ... as an area of study separate from other theological areas as to its scope and subject-matter, but as the whole of dogmatic theology itself” Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations 23 vols.* (Hereafter TI), TI 9 *Writings of 1965–1967*, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 28. Among other things this leads Rahner to maintain that “anthropology and Christology mutually determine each other within Christian dogmatics if they are both correctly understood” (ibid.). From this he concludes that “not only is it important for a true Christology to understand man as the being who is oriented towards an ‘absolute Saviour’ both *a priori* and in actuality, (his essence having been elevated and set in this direction supernaturally by grace), but it is equally important for his salvation that he is confronted with Jesus of Nazareth as this Saviour—which cannot, of course, be transcendently ‘deduced’” (ibid., 29-30). Torrance rejects all three of these ideas because for him the logic of grace is identical with Jesus himself and cannot be detached from him. And for Torrance there is an irreversible relation between grace and our response to Christ in faith. Moreover, we do not have any *a priori* on the basis of which we can know Christ and God himself because the condition of the possibility for that knowledge is the action of the Holy Spirit uniting us to Christ and thus to the Father. Finally, while Rahner claims he is not deducing salvation from his *a priori*, that is in fact what he does, because he misses one of the crucial points of Christology, namely, that incarnation and atonement cannot be separated. Thus, what is revealed by the cross is that we, as fallen sinners, are not orientated toward Christ as the savior but are opposed to him and need to experience his judgment and grace by taking up our cross and following him alone to know God through Jesus himself. From our encounter with Christ we learn that on our own we are enemies of grace and become true children of God by not relying on ourselves at all and turning to Christ alone as our savior.

³⁶ Ibid.

is considered "in light of the teaching of St Anselm, it becomes very apparent that the root difficulty lies in the admission of a *non-conceptual element* in our basic knowledge of God."³⁷ For Anselm "we cannot have experience of Him or believe in Him without conceptual forms of understanding—as Anselm used to say: *fides esse nequit sine conceptione*."³⁸ It is just because for Anselm "it is through his Word and Spirit" that we know God "in his own Being and according to his own nature" that he "could reject a non-conceptual relation to God."³⁹ Anselm's view cuts the ground out from under the Protestant liberalism of the 19th century that continues today in the form of Neo-Protestantism. It also cuts the ground out from under the transcendental Thomist view, which Torrance claims does not really overcome Kant at all because it grounds knowledge of the truth in some sense in us and our intellectual actions that supposedly respond to God, but actually are responding to the God which we equate with our non-conceptual transcendental experiences of reality.

Torrance is direct: "There can be no knowledge of God, no faith [which for Torrance and Calvin means knowledge of the truth], which is not basically conceptual, or conceptual at its very root, and therefore there is no non-conceptual gap between God's revealing of himself and our knowing of him."⁴⁰ Thus, our human concepts "which arise in faith under the creative impact of the speech of God are grounded beyond themselves in the *ratio veritatis* of the divine Being."⁴¹ The point here is crucial. It means that unless the truth of God's own being determines the truth of theology and of our knowledge of grace, then a supposed "non-conceptual" relation to God which always breaks the connection between our concept and God's actual being as the triune God, will have to mean that "instead of terminating upon God himself as their rational ground, our concepts bend back and terminate upon our own consciousness, so that in the last analysis it is our own

³⁷ Ibid., 226.

³⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971; reissued Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 170.

³⁹ Torrance, *Truth and Authority*, 228.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

self-understanding which is the criterion of their truth or falsity: they never get beyond what the medievals called the *objecta mentis*."⁴²

Let me make several more key points here. First, the non-conceptual element in knowing God not only does not overcome Kant, but it always leads to a kind of subjectivism. Torrance certainly knows that when we understand reality by understanding the truth of being and not just our conception of the truth of being, then there is also a "subjective counterpart" to that knowledge. Obviously, this is the case since it is we "who conceive, think, formulate and our knowledge of God grounded upon his own self evidence is not cut off from the fact that it is, *deo dante et deo illuminante*, our knowledge of him."⁴³ Importing some non-conceptual element into knowledge of God at this point leaves out the decisive fact that true knowledge comes only from God encountering us in his grace and love as he meets us in Christ himself. Second, allowing this non-conceptual element into the picture leads to the problematic view of Thomas that since "the object [God] is not sufficiently compelling of itself to our understanding," we then would need "some kind of *lumen infusum* or some kind of *gratia infusa* or indeed *fides infusa*, which then comes, as it were, from behind in order to enable us to assent to the truth in spite of its non-evidence."⁴⁴

This approach, Torrance astutely claims, leads toward fideism and authoritarianism because for this view, assent to the truth requires "submission of the will to what is not evident to the mind rather than through a direct yet willing assent to the truth of being."⁴⁵ Here the non-conceptual element in knowledge of God is overcome, Torrance says, "through an infused grace motivating assent." Torrance claims that "sooner or later, however, that roundabout way is bound to collapse, and then thought breaks apart, and tension arises between authoritarian pronouncements of truth and the consciences of the faithful."⁴⁶ The result in Roman

⁴² Ibid., 229-30.

⁴³ Ibid., 226-7.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 227.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Catholic theology is that “both the theologians of the Curia and the advocates of ‘the new theology’ still rely on St Thomas’s analysis and solution of the problem” so that neither side has sufficiently thought through the problem here by allowing the “*truth of being*” rather than something in us to shape the meaning of God and God’s grace.

Third, let me make more of a direct connection with Torrance’s view of grace to illustrate his reasoning. In his important book, *Theological Science*, Torrance speaks of the logic of grace and claims that since that is the way the truth of God has come to us in history, therefore our thinking about God and God’s grace must allow all our ideas about God and revelation to “reflect the movement of Grace.”⁴⁷ Recall that for Torrance one cannot separate grace from the Giver of grace, namely, Christ himself. With that in mind, Torrance maintains that there is an “unconditional priority of the Truth as Grace and the irreversibility of the relationship established between the Truth and us.”⁴⁸ This priority of grace makes perfect sense when you consider Torrance’s insistence that knowledge of the truth, as knowledge of God, cannot be detached from *the truth of being* and thus cannot be grounded in some supposed non-conceptual relation to God. Any such idea detaches grace from the Giver of grace and locates it in us.

It is important to note that for Torrance, knowledge of the Truth, which follows the logic of grace, “requires acts of obedience on our part.” Of course, he does not mean obedience to our conscience or obedience to church authority; those alternatives would shift the weight from obedience to grace in its identity with Christ to other external factors grounded in us or the church. Torrance says obedience involves decision and makes an interesting distinction. He claims we do not need to make a decision when we say $2 \times 2 = 4$ because such a statement is simply timeless and necessary; that is not something that “becomes true, and has to operate in order to be true. No choice, no decision is involved. The conclusion is necessary; it is not reached through a free act.”⁴⁹ The truth of theology cannot be understood this way because the truth of theology can only be grasped in the

⁴⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 214.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

decision of faith. Here Torrance makes another crucial point that is missed by all of those who speak of faith in a general sense as faith in a higher power or faith in something greater than us, or faith in a supreme being. That is not at all what he means because he is claiming faith, as knowledge of the truth, must reflect the unconditional priority of grace and thus the irreversible relation between the triune God of revelation and us.

Another decisive point Torrance makes is to insist that we must not "think of faith or decision as an organ for perception or as a means of 'making real' the truths of the Gospel."⁵⁰ Such a view annihilates the common concept of faith as faith in a higher power. Torrance says, "personal decision or the act of believing by itself tells us nothing. The act of faith reposes upon the prior act of Christ, a final decision made by Him on our behalf. Our decision for Christ answers to His decision for us, and relies upon it as its objective ground."⁵¹ Because our personal decision is based on God's decision for us in Christ, "our act of faith is grounded on God's decision of Grace to give Himself to us and to choose us for Himself." In other words, it is grounded in election, which for Torrance refers to "the prevenient movement of God's love that is so incarnated in Jesus Christ that in Him we have both the pure act of divine Grace toward man and the perfect act of man in obedient response toward God's Grace."⁵²

In his life of perfect obedience, Christ himself "has appropriated God's Grace for us, because from beginning to the end of His incarnate Life He stood in for us and not only gave an account to God for us, offering our response to the Father, but actualised in Himself the Truth of God translating it into His human life, that we may know the Truth in and through Jesus Christ."⁵³ For these reasons, our personal act of faith, that is, our personal decision, is thus based on his actions for us. Therefore, "we do not relate the truths of the Gospel to one another by our decision, but in and through our faith we discern how the truths are already related

⁵⁰ Ibid., 215.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

in the decisive movements of the Grace of God in Jesus Christ."⁵⁴ That is why everything said in theology must reflect this unconditional priority of God's grace to be faithful to the truth: "It is the logic of Grace that shapes the inner form of every true theological statement."⁵⁵

It will be noticed here that for Torrance, one cannot detach the logic of Grace from Christ himself and thus one cannot know God truly apart from Christ. So, he also speaks of the Logic of Christ as well as the Logic of Grace. And what he says is extremely revealing. First, he says the logic of Christ is "the other side of the Logic of Grace."⁵⁶ Second, he begins his consideration by saying that he is not trying to impose a viewpoint on his theology, but rather, he wishes to understand its "material content" by letting it reveal itself as he directs his questions toward it. Third, when this is done correctly, then Torrance asserts, "we are directed to Jesus Christ, to the Incarnation, to the hypostatic union, the unique togetherness of God and man in Christ which is *normative for every other relationship between man and God*."⁵⁷ Fourth, Torrance then insists that the hypostatic union must not be understood statically but as the union of God and humanity in Christ "in the one Person of the Son running throughout all His historical life from His birth to his resurrection."⁵⁸ That, Torrance says, is the center from which we may consider the doctrine of the Trinity, that is, "of the Father and of the Holy Spirit as well as the Son, and therefore of creation as well as redemption."⁵⁹ All other doctrines have their proper place and truth "by reference to this central point in Jesus Christ."⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., emphasis mine.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 216-17.

Justification by Grace through Faith

Having said this, it is not at all surprising that when he considered the doctrine of justification, Torrance held that,

Because God has concluded us all under His mercy and justified us freely through grace, all men are put on the same level, for whether they are good or bad, religious or secular, within the Church or of the world, they all alike come under the total judgement of grace, the judgement that everything they are and have is wholly called into question simply by the fact that they are saved by grace alone.⁶¹

These remarks are loaded and comprehensive because Torrance is claiming that we cannot rely on our goodness or our religious consciousness, or any authority other than the grace of God, which meets us in Christ as judgment (by calling into question *all* our attempts at self-reliance) and mercy (by freeing us to live in obedience to Christ alone). That is why he says grace is costly for God and for us. It is costly for God because "it is grace through the blood of Christ." But it is costly to humanity because "it lays the axe to the root of all [our] cherished possessions and achievements, not least in the realm of [our] religion, for it is in religion that man's self-justification may reach its supreme and most subtle form."⁶²

Torrance explains that when the Reformers spoke of justification by faith alone, they meant by grace alone. However, the notion of justification by faith is ambiguous because it could be and eventually was interpreted to mean that faith was quickly turned into a justifying work. That, for Torrance, is a disaster because it is not by our faith that we are saved but by the object of faith, namely, Christ himself and Christ alone. Whenever it is thought that "men and women are justified by God's grace *if* they repent and believe," then the unconditional love of God is compromised with some notion of "*conditional grace*," which Torrance says, "permeated Protestantism, Lutheran Pietism, and the Federal Theology of the

⁶¹ Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 56.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Calvinists, Puritanism and Anglicanism alike.”⁶³ He thinks that for Roman Catholics, we first need “an infusion of supernatural grace,” which we receive “*ex opere operato*,” without any cooperation on our part. But once that infusion takes place, we can cooperate with grace and merit more grace.

Torrance rejects this idea of merit as Pelagian because it carries with it the notion that we can rely on what we do to be saved when in fact, salvation comes freely to us only as Christ himself empowers that freedom through union with him in faith. Insightfully, Torrance notes that when righteousness was thought to be “offered to us by God under the condition of faith,” then the Gospel is distorted and “a new legalism resulted.”⁶⁴ Consequently, once “justifying faith” is turned into a work that we must do to become righteous in relation to God and our neighbors, then that in itself represents a legalizing of the Gospel of free grace. To avoid such legalizing, faith must be seen to be grounded on Christ’s own active obedience and his complete sufficiency for our justification. Only then can we maintain the “unconditionally free proclamation of the Gospel.”⁶⁵

Torrance could not be clearer. He insists, “It is not faith that justifies us, but Christ in whom we have faith.”⁶⁶ This means that if ever one holds that “people will not be saved *unless* they make the work of Christ real for themselves by their own personal decision, or that they will be saved *only if* they repent and believe” then that thinking makes Christ’s own work “conditional upon what the sinner does.”⁶⁷ That is a disastrous view of the Gospel because it “throws the ultimate responsibility for a man’s salvation back upon himself.”⁶⁸ That is not good news. That is bad news because, even in our goodness, we are sinners at enmity with God by virtue of our attempts to be self-reliant independently of grace. However, we need God’s unconditional forgiving grace to live in freedom before God and others.

⁶³ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 57-8.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 58.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

While Christ's work for us calls for repentance and obedience, that cannot imply that we "can be saved on condition that [we] repent and believe" because this conditional view always shifts the emphasis "from 'Christ' to 'me', so that what becomes finally important is 'my faith', 'my decision', 'my conversion', and not really Christ himself."⁶⁹

For Torrance, the ultimate negative example that shifts the emphasis from Christ to us is Bultmann's idea that we are saved by our existential decision, which then takes the place of Christ. Luther believed there was nothing we could do to escape our "in-turned, self-centred self;" he thus refused to hold that the truth of our justification could be equated with what the Gospel means to us. That is because faith "rests entirely on the objective fact proclaimed by the Gospel that Jesus Christ was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification."⁷⁰ Bultmann distorted this by claiming that all New Testament statements about what Christ has done for us must be "transposed to speak only of what *He means for me*."⁷¹ It is certainly true that what Christ has done has meaning for me and for everyone else. But Torrance says that this objective action of Christ dying on the cross and being raised from the dead for us and our salvation is exactly what Bultmann ends up denying. He drops the objective events that occurred in Christ for us and substitutes what he considers its meaning for us. So, Torrance says, for Bultmann, the meaning of the Gospel is not found in the death of Christ on the cross, which, in itself, has no meaning for us, but in the preaching of the apostles about that event, which we then apply to ourselves. Bultmann shifts the weight from the objective actions of Christ for us to the meaning we construct from our hearing of the Gospel. For Bultmann I must "be prepared to give up any attempt at the kind of security that finds for faith an objective act of God in history, and take the road of radical decision in which I work out the meaning for myself in the present."⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 59.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

With this thinking, Bultmann snaps the connection between faith and what Christ actually has done objectively for us because, for him, faith is faith in “man’s own human act, his existential decision, the process by which he gives meaning to the *kerygma* for himself in the present.” Torrance unequivocally rejects this thinking because “whenever we take our eyes off the centrality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ and His objective vicarious work, the Gospel disappears behind man’s existentialized self-understanding, and even the Reality of God Himself is simply reduced to ‘what He means for me’ in the contingency and necessities of my own life purpose.”⁷³ Torrance perceptively noted Bultmann’s mistake, asserting that,

The difficulty of Bultmann’s position becomes clear when we find that even the fatherhood of God becomes problematic. In *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (p. 69), Bultmann says, ‘in the conception of God as Father the mythological sense vanished long ago’, but he says that we can speak of God as Father in an analogical sense. However, he also says that ‘we cannot speak of God as he is in himself, but only of what he is doing to us and with us’ (*op. cit.* p. 73). We cannot make general statements about God, only existential statements about our relation to him. ‘The affirmation that God is creator cannot be a theoretical statement about God as *creator mundi* (creator of the world) in a general sense. The affirmation can only be a personal confession that I understand myself to be a creature which owes its existence to God’ (*op. cit.* p. 69). Statements about God are not to be understood as objective (that is mythology) – they have to be understood as existential statements (*op. cit.* p. 61ff). But if we can say nothing about God in himself or about what he does objectively, can we still give any content to his actions in relation to ourselves, and can we really say anything at all of God, even in analogical language? Can Bultmann discard what he thinks of as mythological and still retain the analogical?⁷⁴

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 287-8.

Notice that objectivity here means for Torrance that we must be able to speak about God in himself and not just about what we think God is doing for us because the latter view reduces the immanent to the economic Trinity. That's what Bultmann did by saying we cannot say anything about God in himself. Torrance rightly holds that we need to recover the fact that Christ himself is the one who gives meaning to our justification and sanctification. He says, "everything is interpreted by reference to who He was and is. After all, it was not the *death* of Jesus that constituted atonement, but Jesus Christ the Son of God offering Himself in sacrifice for us. Everything depends on *who* He was, for the significance of His acts in life and death depends on the nature of His person."⁷⁵ Bultmann's approach undermines this view of Jesus's death because in Torrance's estimation, for Bultmann God "is present and active in the death of Jesus Christ in no other way than he is present and active in a fatal accident in the street."⁷⁶

For Torrance, because you cannot separate the gifts of eternal life and knowledge of the truth that are ours in Christ from Christ himself, all our personal relations can only be rightly understood from the "unique relation of divine and human natures in the One Person of the Son."⁷⁷ Consequently, we can only grasp "the interior logic of theological thinking" from "the inner life and being of Jesus Christ, in the hypostatic union."⁷⁸ This is a logic "that is in Christ before it is in our knowledge of Him."⁷⁹ Do not allow this remark to slip by unnoticed. It is a decisive remark because with this statement, Torrance is holding fast to his belief that there is no possibility at all of any *a priori* understanding either of Jesus Christ or of Christology and thus of God himself. Thus,

We cannot know Christ *a priori*, but only after and only in his action, but in *his* action. Thus to assert that we know the deity of Christ *a posteriori* is not to say that it is an *arrière-pensée*! The Divinity of

⁷⁵ Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 64.

⁷⁶ Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 277.

⁷⁷ Torrance, *Theological Science*, 217.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Christ can be no after-thought for faith but is its immediate asseveration in the holy Presence of the Son of God. After-thoughts as such are bound to degenerate into value-judgements, and thence into doubt and even disbelief.⁸⁰

We know Christ only as he gives himself to be known and thus only *a posteriori*. That is why Torrance insists that "We cannot earn knowledge of Christ, we cannot achieve it, or build up to it. We have no capacity or power in ourselves giving us the ability to have mastery over this fact."⁸¹ This is because "we know him in terms of *himself*. We know him out of pure grace as one who gives himself to us and freely discloses himself to us."⁸² Christ gives himself to us "by his own power and agency, by his Holy Spirit, and in the very act of knowing him we ascribe all the possibility of our knowing him to Christ alone, and none of it to ourselves."⁸³

So, when we know Christ, we apprehend the "logic that inheres ontologically and personally in Him but which is reflected noetically and sacramentally in us in the conformity of our life and thought to Him and in the directing of them through Him to God the Father."⁸⁴ Torrance is very clear that he does not want to make the hypostatic union into some "ideological truth" which we can wield at will because, like all theological concepts, that concept does not have the truth in itself. Its only function is to point us to Jesus Christ "who meets us as very God and very Man in one Person, who is Lord over all our knowing of Him and must remain Lord over all our articulation and formulation of the truths He communicates to us."⁸⁵ For this reason Torrance asserts "we must hold together 'the logic of Grace' and the 'logic of Christ', for it is only in the freedom of His Grace that God's truth has come into our

⁸⁰ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 22. With this remark Torrance was rejecting the approach of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) and those who embrace his method.

⁸¹ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 2.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁴ Torrance, *Theological Science*, 217.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

midst and assumed human nature into union with Himself, thus establishing the hypostatic union."⁸⁶

From here, Torrance employs the two important theological categories of *enhypostasis* and *anhypostasis* to explain the function of grace in Christ. The hypostatic union can only be properly understood therefore "as the expression of the act of divine Grace and the irreversible relation between God's Grace and man."⁸⁷ He says, "*Anhypostasia* asserts the unconditional priority of Grace, that everything in theological knowledge derives from God's Grace, while all truths and their relations within our thinking must reflect the movement of Grace." Then he says, "*enhypostasia* asserts that God's Grace acts only as Grace. God does not override us but makes us free."⁸⁸ The fact that God makes us free and does not override us is an enormously important point that is sometimes misunderstood by commentators on Torrance who think that his emphasis on Christ leaves no room for us and our free decisions and actions. It is quite the contrary. It is just because his humanity is the humanity of the Word and cannot be separated from his being as the Word incarnate that he acts in human freedom spontaneously in relation to God and us. Torrance claims he brings us into union with himself so that we can share in his life and love. It is in this way that "He sets us on our feet as persons in personal relation with Him, affirming and recreating our humanity in communion with Him; He bestows His love freely upon us and asks of us the free love of our hearts; He takes our cause upon Himself and makes provision for true response on our part as we are allowed to share in the human life and response of Jesus to the Father."⁸⁹ In Torrance's view then, the doctrine of "*enhypostasia* asserts the full unimpaired reality of the humanity of the historical Jesus as the humanity of the Son of God" and also "affirms in our theological knowledge full and unimpaired place for human decision, human response, and human thinking in relation to the Truth of God's Grace."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 218.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

As we know Christ, we are conformed to him in thought and action so that it is “only in conformity to the movement of Grace in Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, that we may discern the interior logic of theological knowledge.”⁹¹ As grace “from beginning to end” therefore, “it is Christ the Truth who adapts us to Himself” so that it is through union with him in his “own perfect humanity, that He both affirms our humanity and imprints upon it the pattern of His own life. That is the logic that is in Christ before it is in our knowing.”⁹² In our faithfulness to him, as he reveals himself to us as “God and Man in one Person, there arise analogical forms of personal life and understanding within us” and that is the “interior logic of theology.”⁹³ Torrance thinks that Christ is the material logic here, and all our formal logic must be subordinated to him. Unless that happens, we will simply read logical necessities into Christ and into the nature of grace and of God himself.

Comparing Rahner and Torrance

Now, let us compare Torrance’s reflections on grace and knowledge of God with the views of Karl Rahner by assessing their views of grace and nature in relation to Christology and the doctrine of God. At one point, Torrance thought Rahner could help bring Catholic and Protestant theology together by beginning theology

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

exclusively with the economic trinitarian self-revelation.⁹⁴ But Torrance later came to see more clearly than he did when he criticized Rahner for not consistently allowing the economic Trinity to determine his thought that there were serious problems in Rahner's approach. While Rahner formally held that proper view of beginning only with the economic trinitarian self-revelation and, while that view would have had a unifying effect, his actual method allowed him to read logical

⁹⁴ See Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) Chapter 4. Torrance summarized the results of a Colloquium that discussed Rahner's trinitarian theology in 1975. He wrote: "The basic approach by Karl Rahner from God's saving revelation of himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in history, pivoting upon God's concrete and effective self-communication in the Incarnation, has the effect of making the Economic Trinity the norm for all our thought and speech about God, and therefore of destroying the isolation of the treatise *On the Triune God (De Deo Trino)* from the treatise *On the One God (De Deo Uno)*," 77-8. With such a method there is the possibility of "rapprochement between Roman Catholic theology and Evangelical theology, especially as represented by the teaching of Karl Barth," *ibid.* I have demonstrated in detail that while Torrance's statement here is correct, the fact of the matter is that Rahner's transcendental theology does not explicitly, decisively, and consistently begin with God's self-revelation in Christ, but rather with our supposed experience of revelation in the depths of our existence which he then attempts to connect with Jesus Christ and knowledge of the Trinity. That is why he thinks natural theology and revealed theology and Christology and anthropology exist in a mutually conditioning relationship. See Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology 2nd Edition* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 74-88, 207-61, 323-36, 358-78. It is that mutual conditioning that Torrance consistently rejected by insisting on the irreversibility of grace and our experience of and knowledge of God's self-revelation and of the Trinity. Even in his hopeful summary of the judgments of the Colloquium on the Trinity Torrance noted the problem in Rahner's thought: "The main difficulty we have had with Rahner's treatise is with the way in which he has posed and framed the following axiom: 'The "Economic" Trinity is the "Immanent" Trinity and the "Immanent" Trinity is the "Economic" Trinity', and with the way in which he has set out the transition from the Economic Trinity to the Immanent Trinity, and grounded the former in the latter, for in spite of the relation of *identity* between the Economic and the Immanent Trinity as immanent, that is, as it is in God, in such a way that it precludes (sic) from God's free self-communication, and so a moment of abstraction appears to be introduced between what God is in himself and the mode of his self-revelation and self-communication to us," (79). That abstraction occurs precisely because of Rahner's choice to begin his reflections with our supposed transcendental experiences which for him include everyone's unthematic, non-objective, and non-conceptual knowledge of God, instead of exclusively with Jesus Christ himself. That is why Rahner could say: "Revealed theology has the human spirit's transcendental and limitless horizon as its inner motive and as the precondition of its existence" (TI 9, 34). Torrance would reject this assertion claiming that revealed theology is grounded only in Christ and not at all in our transcendental experience as its precondition; the only precondition for revelation is the fact that Christ empowers us through his Spirit to be one with him and to know God the Father through union with him.

necessities back into the Trinity. It is that failure to allow the material content of theology, namely, Jesus Christ (theology's material logic), to be his sole starting point and criterion for theology that creates difficulties and inconsistencies in Rahner's thinking. My hope in this article is to show that there can only be a genuine unity between the Reformed views of Torrance and the Roman Catholic views of Rahner if and to the extent that both theologians allow the logic of grace to be determined by the logic of Christ.

In a chapter on "Grace and nature" in his book on Rahner, William V. Dych, who is a highly regarded interpreter of Rahner, begins discussing Rahner's views by noting that in his discussion of God's hiddenness Rahner explains that his philosophical and speculative knowledge proceeds "from a conviction of faith, that is from a strictly theological proposition."⁹⁵ What is Rahner's theological proposition? Rahner says that the theological proposition that "forms the basis of all the reflections which are contained in [his] essay" is that "God himself and nothing else is our eternal life, however he may be understood by us here and now."⁹⁶ Thus, for him, philosophy serves theology by making "the primary theological statement intelligible."⁹⁷ How does Rahner proceed?

He says, "'The Truth' occurs in the basic experience of the mystery itself."⁹⁸ Rahner continues by explaining that

the essence of knowledge lies in the mystery which is the object of primary experience and is alone self-evident. The unlimited and transcendent nature of man, the openness to the mystery itself which is given radical depth by grace does not turn man into the event of the absolute spirit in the way envisaged by German idealism ... it directs him rather to the incomprehensible mystery, in relation to which the

⁹⁵ William V. Dych, S.J., *Karl Rahner*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 32. Dych is referring here to Rahner, TI 16, "The Hiddenness of God," 235.

⁹⁶ Rahner, TI 16, 236.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

openness of transcendence is experienced.⁹⁹

What is that mystery? For Rahner, that mystery is, as he has already said, God. But it will be recalled that he says it is God "however he may be understood by us here and now." And that is the problem. This approach to truth and to knowledge of God is presented without any specific reference to Jesus Christ as *the* Truth, and indeed as the Way, the Truth, and the Life as Torrance claimed from the start of his understanding of the Truth as discussed above. So Rahner then contends that,

in forming any concept, he [the human person] understands himself as the one who reaches out beyond the conceptual into the nameless and the incomprehensible. Transcendence grasped in its unlimited breadth is the a priori condition of objective and reflective knowledge and evaluation. It is the very condition of its possibility ... It is also the precondition for the freedom which is historically expressed and objectified.¹⁰⁰

Rahner explains that knowing this mystery means we are "addressed by what no longer has a name, and it is relying on a reality which is not mastered but is itself the master. It is the speech of the being without a name, about which clear statements are impossible."¹⁰¹

Rahner even claims that "The origin and goal of knowledge in the mystery is one of its constituent elements. In an unthematic way this is experienced in day-to-day knowledge and may be called 'primary' in the sense of the a priori condition of possibility of all knowing, even though it only becomes thematic in a secondary sense through subsequent reflection upon its own a priori presuppositions."¹⁰² For Rahner, then, it is "the unfolding of the mystery itself, from the *one* truth" that one experiences in this way. And the "presence of the one truth is of course unthematic, since it exists in the first instance as the condition of possibility of spatio-temporal

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 236-7.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 237.

¹⁰² Ibid.

and categorial-historical experience."¹⁰³ Rahner claims this is the event of spirit and is indeed an experience of what he calls the *deus absconditus* (the hidden God). Thus, "knowledge is primarily the experience of the overwhelming mystery of this 'deus absconditus.'"¹⁰⁴ From this it follows that "divine revelation is not the unveiling of something previously hidden" but it refers "to the fact that the 'deus absconditus' becomes radically present as the abiding mystery."¹⁰⁵ So, revelation does not mean that "the mystery is overcome by gnosis bestowed by God." Rather, "it is the history of the deepening perception of God *as* the mystery."¹⁰⁶

Enough has been said here to see some clear contrasts between Rahner's view of the truth and of God as mystery and Torrance's view of God as truth and mystery. In this article, I wish to focus primarily on the knowledge of God's grace in its identity with the Giver of grace. But before exploring this view in relation to Rahner's specific views of grace, it is important to see that Rahner embraces several ideas that Torrance specifically and with good reason rejected.

First, Rahner embraces what he calls "unthematic" or non-conceptual knowledge of God as mystery. This conception of mystery as non-conceptual is what he means when he speaks of "transcendental revelation." That approach leads him to conclude that our knowledge of God develops from the transcendental experience of the "nameless." That is why Rahner could say knowledge of God is an *a priori* knowledge of mystery which everyone in their experience of self-transcendence knows unthematically. It refers "to a knowledge which is both transcendental *and* unavoidable and is always sustained by the offer of God's self-communication in *grace*."¹⁰⁷ Consequently, for Rahner, "the doctrine of the *natural* knowability and knowledge of God is not a knowledge which appears in isolation, but one element, only subsequently isolated, in a single knowledge of God,

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 238.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Rahner, TI 9, 135.

authorized by him in its direct relation to him, which, when it is accepted, is already faith."¹⁰⁸

Notice the progression of thought here. Rahner moves from our transcendental experiences of the nameless to the idea that everyone has non-conceptual or unthematic knowledge of God as mystery and then to the idea that we have an obediencial potency for revelation and a supernatural existential. That is why he can claim that even natural knowledge of God is true knowledge of God. Thus, everyone has unavoidable knowledge of God as a nameless mystery and which is the *a priori* for understanding God, revelation, grace, and faith itself for Christians. However, the obvious problem here is this: Rahner assumes that natural knowledge of God as absolute being is the same as knowing God in faith. It is not because faith, by its very nature, is directly tied to Jesus Christ who is the object of faith. There is no mention of Christ in Rahner's statement about faith here. Of course, Rahner wishes to tie knowledge of God to salvation and thus to Christ. But he is unable to maintain the irreversibility of the object of faith (Christ) and us as the subjects experiencing that faith. Thus, he can say

a theological object's significance for salvation (which is a necessary factor in any theological object) can only be investigated by inquiring at the same time as to man's *saving receptivity* for this object. However, this receptivity must not be investigated only 'in the abstract' nor merely presupposed in its most general aspects. It must be reflected upon with reference to the concrete object concerned, which is only *theologically relevant* as a result of and for the purpose of this receptiveness for salvation. Thereby the object also to some extent lays down the conditions for such receptiveness.¹⁰⁹

It will be noticed here that Rahner claims we have a saving receptivity for God and God's grace. For Torrance, as we have seen, our actual encounter with Christ discloses that we have no such receptivity and that our reception of revelation is the work of the Holy Spirit uniting us to Christ. For Rahner, our saving receptivity is

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 135-6.

¹⁰⁹ Rahner, TI 9, 35-6.

subjective and can be understood by exploring our subjectivity. Torrance rejects that approach all along the line because for him it is *exclusively* the object of faith that determines the truth of our theological knowledge. And that truth is identical with Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of the Father. Finally, Rahner wants objective knowledge here, but he says only that the object "to some extent lays down the conditions for" reception of such knowledge. If that is in any sense true, then that idea in and of itself has already compromised the sovereignty of God's grace and love by inadvertently advocating some idea of conditional salvation. With these assumptions Rahner is eventually led to conclude that self-acceptance is the same as accepting God and Christ. It is not. A closer look at Torrance's view here will be helpful.

For Torrance, as we have seen, knowledge of God comes to us from Christ himself through the power of the Holy Spirit such that we know God's name precisely as the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, the triune God is not nameless. And knowledge of God does not derive from a general experience of mystery which we can know *a priori*. God has a name and that is made known by grace (through Christ) and thus in faith as we recognize that we are made righteous by what he has done and does for us as the savior of the world. Of course, it is not our faith that grounds that knowledge but the object of faith. That is why Torrance consistently links our knowledge of God to the doctrine of justification, claiming that what is required is a recovery of

an understanding of justification which really lets Christ occupy the centre, so that everything is interpreted by reference to who He was and is ... we must allow the Person of Christ to determine for us the nature of his saving work, rather than the other way round. The detachment of atonement from incarnation is undoubtedly revealed by history to be one of the most harmful mistakes of Evangelical Churches.¹¹⁰

Grounding his knowledge of God in Jesus Christ as the revelation of God for us, Torrance disallows any sort of unthematic or non-conceptual approach to knowing

¹¹⁰ Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 64.

God and salvation because he follows Anselm and claims, as noted above, that we cannot have experience of or knowledge of the Christian God without concepts.¹¹¹ By ascribing unthematic knowledge to everyone, Rahner undermines objective knowledge of God as the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and opens the door to his notion of anonymous Christianity. For Torrance, there is no such thing as anonymous Christianity because to be a Christian means to accept Jesus Christ as the Truth. And that cannot be done without a specific concept of who he was and is and what he has done and is doing as the one Mediator here and now.

This grounding our knowledge *conceptually* in Christ is an exceptionally important point because grounding knowledge of God and of Christ in some unthematic experience, Torrance believes, will always lead to some form of subjectivism as in the thinking of John Robinson and Paul Tillich, who could be considered liberal Protestant counterparts of the Roman Catholic Rahner. Non-conceptual knowledge of God begins for Rahner with an experience of the nameless that leads him to a view of mystery that he calls God, no matter how that is understood. That approach clearly leaves open the possibility of naming God in various ways other than as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By contrast, Torrance insists that when we speak of God as “person,” then “the kind of ‘person’ that is meant is determined by who God is, and so we speak of God as *the* Person, and indeed the Source of all personal existence.”¹¹² However, Torrance then insists, that when we speak of God as “person,” then that notion of person when “used of God must be *ontologically* derived from God’s own nature, and therefore from the Trinity, and *not logically* worked up from general ideas we already hold on other

¹¹¹ For a full discussion of Torrance and Rahner on non-conceptual knowledge of God see Paul D. Molnar, *Freedom, Necessity, and the Knowledge of God: In Conversation with Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance* (London: T&T Clark, 2022), Chapter Four.

¹¹² Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 80.

grounds.”¹¹³ As I have discussed in detail elsewhere,¹¹⁴ the issue here is illustrated in the thinking of those who wish to re-name God as mother, lover, and friend, She Who Is, or even as holy mystery with Rahner instead of exclusively as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On this basis, Torrance says all our statements about God must be traced back to the Trinity and not to any general ideas of mystery or of the nameless. That is why he firmly rejects John Robinson’s attempt to re-think God in pictures “deemed relevant to ‘secular’ man, which we must put in the place of the old image of God.”¹¹⁵ Such thinking presents God as the ground of our being. But that is to think “out of a centre in the depth of man rather than out of a centre in God himself” and that, Torrance says, is mythology and not theology.¹¹⁶ Torrance complains that thinking of God in this fashion presents us with a God who cannot interact with us in any causal way. This is the case because for Robinson, God “cannot be other than what Robinson always and actually is in the depth of himself.”¹¹⁷ This approach by Robinson, Torrance insists, makes his position worse than straightforward deism because “he is unable to distinguish God ‘out there’ rationally as objectively and transcendently other than the depths of his own being, and so he is thrown back upon himself to give content to his notion of God, as what is of ultimate concern *for* him in the depth and significance of his own being.”¹¹⁸ That God, Torrance says, is nothing other than “the ‘God’ he wants” instead of the

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ See, e.g., Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* 2nd Edition (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), *Faith, Freedom and the Spirit: The Economic Trinity in Barth, Torrance and Contemporary Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), and *Freedom, Necessity, and the Knowledge of God: In Conversation with Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance* (London: T&T Clark, 2022).

¹¹⁵ Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 80.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 81.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

true God. It is a "God" that he can use "for his own ends and satisfactions."¹¹⁹ That Torrance asserts is an idol.

The same thing happens to Paul Tillich, who believes that if you do not like the traditional name for God, then you can follow the pattern of "depth-psychology," which leads us from the surface of our "self-knowledge" into "our depth."¹²⁰ While this depth-psychology 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*."¹²¹ Tillich says that is what the word God means. From this, he concludes that "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."¹²² Notice how close Tillich's view of God is to that of John Robinson. Both theologians equate knowledge of God with knowledge of our own depth and the ground of being conceived in light of that experience. From that, they reckon that by speaking of our depth, and ultimate concerns we speak of God.

However, given Torrance's insistence that knowledge of God must be grounded in the nature of God as the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, this amounts to subjectivism and mythology on the basis of which Robinson and Tillich are out for what Torrance called "*cheap grace*, i.e. the 'God' *they* want, one to suit themselves and modern 'secular' man, rather than the God of *costly grace* who calls for the renewing of our minds in which we are not schematized to the patterns of this world but are transformed in conformity with His own self-revelation in Jesus Christ."¹²³ In other words both theologians neglect Jesus Christ and his message,

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 81-2.

¹²⁰ Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 56.

¹²¹ Ibid., 57.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 82.

“where He asks them to renounce themselves, take up the cross and follow Him unreservedly all along the road to crucifixion and resurrection.”¹²⁴

Second, because Rahner begins his theology with experiences of self-transcendence and with a general concept of mystery linked to his view of the nameless, he then is led to believe, as Dych notes, that grace cannot be seen in some “extrinsic” way such that “grace appears ... as a mere superstructure ... imposed upon nature by God’s decree.”¹²⁵ Rahner wanted to follow the “new theology” and hold that the human desire for God is both truly human, and at the same time it is “an intrinsic part of human nature,” and yet it is still grace. The new theologians, especially Henri de Lubac wanted to conceptualize grace by linking the human desire for God with grace. However, he did not clearly distinguish grace from nature, and thus, for Rome, the new theologians did not “do justice to the sovereign freedom of God’s grace.”¹²⁶

For Rahner, if grace is merely an addition to human nature, then “the whole realm of the human as such seemed to be deprived of any ultimate meaning.” Rahner was dissatisfied with Vatican I, which considered the relation of nature and grace in the context of knowledge of God by asking “how the natural knowledge of God is related to the supernatural knowledge of revelation.” This Council simply taught that “they cannot contradict each other because they both have the same source in God.”¹²⁷ Rahner thought this view did not appreciate that there was a deeper unity of our natural knowledge and graced knowledge. In any case, Dych points out that Vatican II discussed the relation of nature and grace in the context of history rather than of knowledge of God. So, Dych says Vatican II maintained the “absolute freedom and gratuity of God’s grace, but at the same time [wished] to see it as a universal possibility for every person.”¹²⁸ Discussing the relation between nature and grace in the context of history rather than in the context of knowledge

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Rahner, cited in Dych, 33.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 35.

of God is the context within which Rahner worked out his view of grace and nature. Interestingly, Dych concludes by asking, "What concept of grace would allow it to be utterly free and gratuitous and at the same time an intrinsic part of all human history?"¹²⁹ Please notice that in all of this discussion of grace thus far in both Rahner and Dych, there is no mention of the need for justification or the need for Jesus Christ as the Giver of grace or the need to look beyond ourselves. That is the case because both theologians are attempting to explain the relation between grace and nature by focusing on our depth experiences and our supposed historical experiences of grace, which are presumed to be part of human transcendental experience.

It is here that Rahner presents a view that is more closely aligned with the problematic thinking of John Robinson and Paul Tillich than it is with a view that does not detach grace from the Giver of grace. Instead of focusing on Christ as the center as Torrance clearly did, Rahner, relying on the thought of Heidegger, focuses on our depth experience by asking,

*must not what God decrees for man be eo ipso an interior ontological constituent of his concrete quiddity 'terminative', even if it is not a constituent of his 'nature'? For an ontology which grasps the truth that man's concrete quiddity depends utterly on God is not his binding disposition eo ipso not just a juridical decree of God but precisely what man is, hence not just an imperative proceeding from God but man's most inward depth?*¹³⁰

These assertions are clearly problematic when compared to the views of Torrance. Why? Because Rahner does not turn to the objective knowledge of God that meets us in the crucified and risen Lord to understand the gratuity of God's grace. Instead, in a manner similar to Schleiermacher, who thought that knowledge of God started with the human feeling of absolute dependence on God, Rahner attempts to explain the nature of grace by referring to our human "quiddity," which he says depends upon God. From this he presumes that since this decree of God is what we

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Rahner, TI 1, 302.

are in our humanity as dependent on God, it is "not just an imperative proceeding from God but man's most inward depth." Here, Rahner equates our experiences of depth with knowledge of God and relationship with God. That is the main problem in his entire approach to this issue.

While Torrance refuses to separate incarnation from atonement because it is in the incarnation that the Incarnate Word put us into right relationship with God through his own vicarious life of obedience to the Father, Rahner, with Tillich and Robinson, ignores the problem of sin with this approach as well as the need for reconciliation *in order* to know God and God's grace in its identity with Christ. Put bluntly, by focusing on our humanity as it is presumed to be geared toward grace, Rahner never even mentions what, for Torrance, was a crucial point. That point is that while God created us for fellowship with with him, the problem of sin intervened and has left us an enmity with God so that our free-will is our self-will. And for Torrance, we have no way of escaping this predicament. Thus, even in our moral goodness, we are not able to be in right relationship with God. It is only when we live our justification by grace as this is ours objectively in Christ that we give up all self-reliance and live in fellowship with God as God intended and intends. This thinking also applies to natural knowledge. So, when Vatican I asserted that there cannot be any contradiction between natural knowledge of God and revealed knowledge because God is the source of both, the whole problem of sin and the need for reconciliation *before* we can know the truth of God is bypassed. Natural knowledge is possible because we are God's creatures. But to say that natural knowledge of God is not in conflict with the true God who meets us in his justifying grace through faith is a mistake because no natural knowledge of God is bound to the knowledge of the Father that comes to us from the Son and by the Holy Spirit.

In any case, because of this approach, Rahner then makes a claim that Torrance directly rejected, namely, that the divine decree of which he spoke "necessarily entails an ontological change in human existence."¹³¹ In Rahner's understanding, uncreated grace and created grace mutually condition each other so that God's relation to us through uncreated grace means that God communicates himself to us in the power of the Holy Spirit. But that, Rahner says, "implies a new

¹³¹ Dych, 36.

relation of God to man. But this can only be conceived of as founded upon an absolute entitative modification of man himself, which modification is the real basis of the new real relation of man to God upon which rests the relation of God to man."¹³² And for Rahner, "this absolute entitative modification and determination of man is created grace."¹³³ Further, Rahner maintains that "Grace, being supernaturally divinizing, must rather be thought of as a change in the structure of human consciousness."¹³⁴ Recall that Torrance rejected the Hellenistic view of grace as a "detachable and transferrable divine quality which may inhere in or be possessed by the human being to whom it is given in virtue of which he is somehow 'deified' or 'divinised'."¹³⁵ Such deification, in Torrance's view suggests a change in human nature. The key problem with this idea is that it then leads one to think grace can be understood by focusing on human nature instead of turning to Christ, who enables us, as fallen creatures, to be in union with God through Christ's forgiving grace and not otherwise. So, for Torrance any changes in us are those which can be seen as the conforming of our lives and activity to the logic of grace by taking up our cross and following Jesus.

This issue of focusing on changes in us instead of on Christ in and through whom we are changed, is no superficial problem because Rahner claims that as humans, we are "inwardly other in structure than [we] would be if [we] did not have" God as our supernatural end which we experience in our desire for mystery.¹³⁶ So, to safeguard the gratuity of God's grace without the notion of pure nature, Rahner thinks that grace should be understood as a "supernatural existential." This is a disastrous proposal. On the one hand, it leads to the notion that we have an obediencial potency for God notwithstanding the Fall. On the other hand, it encourages the assumption that we know the true God through natural theology. In order to avoid extrinsicism, this assumption leads Rahner to make statements that certainly appear to ascribe grace and revelation to us directly in

¹³² Rahner, TI 1, 324.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Rahner, TI 5, 103.

¹³⁵ Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 140.

¹³⁶ Rahner, TI 1, 303.

our transcendental experiences. Ascribing grace and revelation directly to us this way opens the door to Pelagianism and to ideas of self-justification.

Supernatural Existential

Let me address what is meant by the supernatural existential by starting with the words of William V. Dych. He asks: "What concept of grace would allow it to be utterly free and gratuitous and at the same time an intrinsic part of all human history?"¹³⁷ Notice how very different this question is from the approach taken by Torrance. Recall that for Torrance, grace, as God's gift, "is none other than the risen Christ who confronts men through the word of his Gospel. *Charis* is not here, therefore, in any sense a quality adhering to Paul, but a particular manifestation of the gracious purpose and power of Christ."¹³⁸ First, Dych, with Rahner, is rightly trying to recognize and maintain the freedom of God in relation to us. Second, he does so not by turning to the freedom of grace actualized for the human race in the history of Israel and uniquely in Jesus Christ, as Torrance did. Instead, with Rahner, he universalizes grace and then thinks of it as "an intrinsic part of all human history." According to Torrance, God's grace is active in all of human history. But that grace cannot be conceptualized as an intrinsic part of all human history without detaching it from God's actions in his Word and Spirit.

According to Dych, Rahner conceptualizes God in a way that gives creation and humanity "a supernatural end and this end is first 'in intentione.'" And if this is so, then humanity and the world itself "is by that very fact always and everywhere

¹³⁷ Dych, 35.

¹³⁸ Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace*, 31.

inwardly other in structure than he would be if he did not have this end.”¹³⁹ However, while the “new theologians” thought this inner reference “of man to grace” was “a constituent of his ‘nature’ in such a way that the latter cannot be conceived without it, i.e., as pure nature,” Rahner thought this approach made it impossible to give a complete definition of “pure nature.”¹⁴⁰ Rahner wanted to offer a proper view of “nature without grace” in order to preserve the gratuity of grace. And his way of doing that was with his idea of the “supernatural existential.” Then he could say that nature is a remainder concept when it is subtracted from the supernatural existential.¹⁴¹ But, as noted above, this was bound to be a failure because the whole approach has already universalized grace as an intrinsic part of all human history.

Here is what Rahner thinks regarding the supernatural existential. First, he thinks of revelation itself as, in some fashion, identical with our transcendental dynamisms. Hence, Rahner conceives the universal offer of grace as “always and everywhere and primarily to the transcendental of man as such,” which is accepted and justifying “when this transcendental of man is accepted and sustained by man’s freedom.” Indeed, Rahner believes that “the universality of the factuality of grace from the outset [is] ... an existential of man’s transcendentality

¹³⁹ See Dych, 36. Rahner, TI 1, 302-3 and *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (hereafter FCF) trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978), 128. Rahner carefully notes that God’s self-communication is the “necessary condition which makes possible an acceptance of the gift” so that “this acceptance must be borne by God himself. God’s self-communication as offer is also the necessary condition which makes its acceptance possible” *ibid.* But because Rahner focuses on the human subject with his analysis, he detaches the gift (grace as God’s personal self-communication) from Christ the Giver and then says “God’s self-communication must always be present in man as the prior condition of possibility for its acceptance. This is true insofar as man must be understood as a subject who is capable of such an acceptance, and therefore is also obligated to it ... God’s self-communication must be present in every person as the condition which makes its personal acceptance possible” *ibid.* The obvious problem here from Torrance’s perspective is that since it is God alone who enables us to hear his Word and participate in his own self-knowledge and love as the eternal Father, Son and Spirit, that fact eliminates any idea that God’s self-communication is present in everyone because it is present only in those who are living by grace alone and thus relying on Christ alone.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Rahner, TI 1, 313-14.

as such.”¹⁴² According to John P. Galvin, the supernatural existential refers to “our being in the world, or our being with others ... this existential ... is not given automatically with human nature, but is rather the result of a gratuitous gift of God ... Because of the supernatural existential, grace is always part of our actual existence.”¹⁴³ From Torrance’s perspective presented above, we can easily see the problems embedded in this thinking. Rahner has here conceptualized grace as an infused offer intrinsic to us in our transcendental experiences. This very move destroys the freedom of grace by detaching grace from the active love of God, which comes to the world and to us in the crucified and risen Lord and in him alone, as he is attested in both the Old and New Testaments.

Second, Rahner then presents a view of *conditional* salvation, which Torrance flatly rejected because it throws the weight of salvation back on us sinners who are utterly incapable of escaping the self-will that makes us turn to ourselves for knowledge of the truth in the first place. Third, these remarks demonstrate no recognition of the seriousness of sin with the assumption that we have the freedom to accept the “offer” of grace when, in fact, that freedom must come to us as an act of the risen Lord himself in the power of his Holy Spirit. Thus, for Rahner, the universal offer of grace is accepted and justifying “when this transcendentality of man is accepted and sustained by man’s freedom.” Rahner does mention the problem of sin, but he does not see it the way Torrance does because he thinks that, despite original sin, we have the freedom to accept God’s offer of grace by virtue of our supposed obediencial potency and supernatural existential. So, he visualizes God’s closeness to us as a “holy mystery,” which

is also a hidden closeness, a forgiving intimacy, his real home, that it is a love which shares itself, something familiar which he can approach and turn to from the estrangement of his own perilous and empty life. It is the person who in the forlornness of his guilt still turns in trust to the mystery of his existence which is quietly present and surrenders himself as one who even in his guilt no longer wants to understand

¹⁴² Rahner, TI 18, 182. See also, FCF, 129.

¹⁴³ John P. Galvin, “The Invitation of Grace,” in *A World of Grace*, ed. Leo J. O’Donovan (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 72-3.

himself in a self-centered and self-sufficient way.¹⁴⁴

Notice here that Rahner speaks of guilt and forgiveness not by explicitly focusing on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ in and through which we are judged and forgiven by his personal actions on our behalf. Instead, his focus is on “a transcendental experience of the absolute closeness of God in his radical self-communication.”¹⁴⁵ Consequently, Rahner never notices one of Torrance’s key points, namely, that our free-will is disclosed in Christ as our self-will which we cannot escape without actually turning to Christ and living by grace alone. Rahner thus argues that “When a person in theoretical or practical knowledge or in subjective activity confronts the abyss of his existence, which alone is the ground of everything, and when this person has the courage to look into himself and to find in these depths his ultimate truth, there he can also have the experience that this abyss accepts him as his true and forgiving security.”¹⁴⁶

Unfortunately, while Rahner says he wants to abandon human self-sufficiency, it is here that self-sufficiency rears its ugly head. He tells us to look into ourselves to find in our depth experiences the ultimate truth. But the whole point of recognizing grace in its identity with Christ is that he himself *is* the *ultimate truth* who alone can disclose the depth of sin and the nature of his unconditional free love of us in spite of that sin. Rahner thinks by experiencing some sort of an abyss, we experience some forgiving security. But in that way, he espouses exactly what Torrance rejects, namely, conditional salvation. Rahner’s espousal of conditional salvation is evident in his claim that we can only experience the forgiveness that he has in mind by having the courage to look into ourselves to find the ultimate meaning of truth. That, for Torrance, makes forgiveness dependent on our courage to look into ourselves. He would regard that view of grace as the cheap grace espoused by Bultmann, Tillich and Robinson. This claim illustrates that we cannot escape the sin of self-reliance and self-will at all because salvation and God’s forgiving grace do not depend on us having the courage to look into ourselves. These are unconditionally given in Christ himself and his vicarious life of perfect

¹⁴⁴ Rahner, FCF, 131.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 132.

obedience on our behalf and can only be found in him by looking beyond ourselves toward him. In other words, we can only take up the cross and follow him.

There can be no doubt here that Rahner is speaking of sin, forgiveness, and grace by referring us to ourselves in our experiences of depth. This approach completely side-steps the fact that it is only through Christ's atoning life of perfect obedience to the Father that we can know the true meaning of sin as well as the meaning of salvation through Christ alone and thus by grace alone through faith. It is no accident that Christ is not explicitly mentioned a single time in Rahner's analysis here. This failure to mention Christ explicitly occurs because he has conceptualized the meaning of sin, freedom, salvation, and forgiveness all in general terms based on our transcendental experiences such as experiences of "death," "radical authenticity," and "love."¹⁴⁷

For Torrance, we need to be made free for grace through the act of Christ himself here and now. Apart from conceptual and ontological union with Christ in faith, our free-will is and remains our self-will. No wonder Rahner can conclude that self-acceptance is the same as accepting Christ when he claims, "Anyone who accepts his own humanity in full ... has accepted the son of Man."¹⁴⁸ Such thinking leads directly to his view of anonymous Christianity, which is essentially a Christianity without Christ. Thus, Rahner advocates what he calls "existentiell Christology" and concludes that an anonymous Christian has a real and existential relation to Christ "implicitly in obedience to his orientation in grace toward the God of absolute, historical presence and self-communication. He exercises this obedience by accepting his own existence without reservation."¹⁴⁹ By contrast, Torrance maintains that when confronted by revelation in its identity with Christ, we are called to take up the cross and follow him since he is our salvation. This major difference between the two theologians stems directly from the fact that Rahner turns toward us in our transcendental experiences to explain the meaning of grace and nature and only then towards Christ. In contrast, Torrance turns exclusively toward Christ who alone justifies sinners thus enabling a true understanding of

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 132.

¹⁴⁸ Rahner, TI 4, 119.

¹⁴⁹ Rahner, FCF, 306.

grace and nature. For Torrance, once again, the relationship between Christ and us and thus between grace and nature is an irreversible relationship in which our experiences do not condition or determine in any way the unconditional love of God that comes to us in Christ.

Let me illustrate from another perspective what Rahner has given us here. Listen to the words of William V. Dych. He says Rahner used the word "existential" following Heidegger to analyze human existence by designating "those components which were constitutive of human existence." These components distinguished human beings from other beings. From this, he concludes that "if God created human beings precisely for the life of grace, then the offer and the possibility of grace is given with human nature itself."¹⁵⁰ Notice what is missing here. Torrance thinks Christ is the "personalizing Person" who enables us to be children of God and thus be truly human as God's good creatures by judging us and forgiving us personally. By ascribing the offer and possibility of grace to us in our human nature itself, the problem of sin is simply ignored. We are told that if God created us to share in his own life (which he did), then that must mean that both the offer and possibility of grace is already given to us as part of our human nature as theologically understood within history.

However, after the Fall, our human nature was marked by sin and death and did not possess the offer and possibility of grace in itself. Our human nature was restored for us by being brought into right relation with God by God's grace in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that means the possibility and reality of grace cannot be detached from Christ, the Giver of grace and ascribed directly to us in our fallen human nature. Dych, with Rahner, thinks that "Creation is intrinsically ordered to the supernatural life of grace as its deepest dynamism and final goal."¹⁵¹ It is true that creation needs God's grace to be what it was meant to be but is not, because of original sin. However, for Torrance, to claim that any of our dynamisms is identical with our movement toward our final goal, which is supposed to be the supernatural life of grace is a flat confusion of nature and grace. It is precisely what Torrance rejected in rejecting the views of John Robinson,

¹⁵⁰ Dych, 36.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Rudolf Bultmann, and Paul Tillich. There is no doubt here that Dych and Rahner have confused nature and grace. Dych writes: "The offer of this grace, then, is an existential, an intrinsic component of human existence and part of the very definition of the human in its historical existence."¹⁵² By contrast, if with Torrance, we do not detach grace from the active mediation of Christ himself through the power of his Holy Spirit, who is always the Giver of grace, then grace, as God's action of love for us in Christ, is not and never becomes a "component of human existence" so that it is "part of the very definition of the human in its historical existence."¹⁵³ So, for Torrance, the offer and possibility of grace meets us only in an encounter with the Word of God, which comes to us in Christ. To live by grace is to accept Christ as the Lord and Savior of the world; it cannot mean simply self-acceptance in our supposed innate movement toward absolute being or what Rahner calls "holy mystery," and then equates with the Trinity. The difference here is that Torrance conceptualizes God's self-communication in Christ in its identity "with God himself in his own eternal Being" with the result that "the Gift and the Giver are one" so that in him we encounter God as he is in himself and also toward us.¹⁵⁴ Rahner and Dych conceptualize God's self-communication as a universal "existential" that is given directly to everyone in their depth experiences or experiences of self-transcendence.¹⁵⁵ That thinking detaches grace from Christ, the Giver of grace, and cuts us off from God in his eternal oneness as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, both noetically and ontologically.

On the one hand, Rahner thinks that "nature has a certain affinity for grace," which essentially means an "affinity for the supernatural existential."¹⁵⁶ This affinity, he believes, is the "concrete mode in which human nature was created and actually exists as a result of God's intention in creating it."¹⁵⁷ Because of this, "'Pure nature' is an abstract possibility, not a reality. Hence ... the supernatural existential wants

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 182.

¹⁵⁵ Dych, 36-8.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 37.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

to affirm something about the reality of grace, namely, that it is a constituent part of our historical human existence."¹⁵⁸ Dych explains that this implies that the terms supernatural and existential affirm "that grace is utterly free and gratuitous and at the same time that it is utterly intrinsic to human nature and human existence." Consequently, "the offer of grace is part of being human."¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, the supernatural existential allows us to understand "God's gracious presence in human existence as an existential" such that God's presence is seen as "universal." Because it is a "transcendental determination" that "permeates and pervades all of human existence" it is "not confined to one compartment of human life or to particular times and places, but touches everything human."¹⁶⁰

Dych's presentation here certainly is an accurate interpretation of Rahner's theology as Rahner claims that God's self-communication "radicalizes" our transcendental experiences so that "the original experience of God even in his self-communication can be so universal, so unthematic and so 'unreligious' that it takes place, unnamed but really, wherever we are living out our existence."¹⁶¹ This thinking leads Rahner to approach Christology in a way Torrance did not. Instead of allowing Christ in his uniqueness as God become man to be his sole starting point, Rahner says,

We are not starting out from the Christological formulations of the New Testament in Paul and John ... we are not assuming the impossibility of going behind such a 'late' New Testament Christology to ask about a more original and somewhat more simple experience of faith with the historical Jesus, in his message, his death, and his achieved finality that we describe as his resurrection.¹⁶²

This approach to Christology is precisely what Torrance firmly rejects by insisting that we cannot separate John and Paul from the other New Testament writings with

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 37-8.

¹⁶¹ Rahner, FCF, 132.

¹⁶² Rahner, TI 18:145.

the claim that we can have a relationship with the historical Jesus, which bypasses his uniqueness as truly divine and truly human. He thus insists that “we know Christ by acknowledging that what confronts us is *revelation*, revelation that tells us that here is true man and true God.”¹⁶³ This revelation is a mystery which we “cannot explain or understand out of our own knowledge” since “he is God, and very God, and yet man and very man: God and man become one person. We know Christ in the mystery of that duality in unity.”¹⁶⁴ Therefore, when we know Christ in his uniqueness, that knowledge comes to us from him alone through the power of his Holy Spirit as a miraculous act of God, and not from us or on account of anything we could know from a simple historical experience of Jesus and his message. Torrance says we must be obedient to this mystery

and seek in every way to let it *declare itself* to us ... we must be faithful to the actual facts, and never allow preconceived notions or theories to cut away some of the facts at the start ... The ultimate fact that confronts us, embedded in history and in the historical witness and proclamation of the New Testament, is the mysterious duality in unity of Jesus Christ, God without reserve, man without reserve, the eternal truth in time, the Word of God made flesh.¹⁶⁵

All of this thinking undercuts Rahner’s attempt to discover what he calls a “questing” or “searching” Christology. Rahner’s search for an a priori anthropology, which he thinks will result in a proper Christology, engages in exactly the thinking Torrance here claims is impossible. Rahner maintains that his searching Christology (the human search for a savior with or without encountering Jesus) is the basis for understanding Christology and operates without an encounter with the concrete historical Jesus.¹⁶⁶ This approach presumes not only that we can understand the mystery of Christ from our own prior understanding of mystery and reality. It also assumes that we can know something of Christ as savior without a specific

¹⁶³ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 3.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Rahner, FCF, 212.

encounter with him. Rahner's "transcendental Christology," therefore, "asks about the a priori possibilities in man which make the coming of the message of Christ possible."¹⁶⁷ Torrance, however, tells us that there is no such *a priori* because when we know Christ, we immediately ascribe the possibility of that knowledge to him and only to him. In his words: "He manifests himself and gives himself to us by his own power and agency, by his Holy Spirit, and in the very act of knowing him we ascribe all the possibility of our knowing him to Christ alone, and none of it to ourselves."¹⁶⁸

Rahner's idea of a supernatural existential allows him to ascribe this possibility directly to us. But in doing this, he obviates the need for Christ at the outset and all along the line to know the truth of revelation and of Christology, including the proper meaning of grace in relation to nature. Many implications follow from this, not the least of which is that he believes "the revealed Word and natural knowledge of God mutually condition each other;"¹⁶⁹ that "the *a priori* transcendental subjectivity of the knower on the one hand and the object of knowledge (and of freedom) on the other are related to one another in such a way that they *mutually condition* one another;"¹⁷⁰ and that "anthropology and Christology mutually determine each other,"¹⁷¹ when in fact they do not. Any such ideas would imply that the truth of our knowledge of Christ and of grace comes, at least in part, from us instead of exclusively from Christ. By contrast, Torrance firmly maintains that such views undermine the sovereignty of God's grace and love that meets us in Christ. Here I would just like focus on two key points, namely, the fact that grace cannot be detached from Christ the Giver of grace and the fact that this means grace simply cannot be properly conceptualized as infused grace. Let me return to the reason why Torrance rejected the notion of created grace to explain this matter.

¹⁶⁷ Rahner, FCF, 207.

¹⁶⁸ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 2.

¹⁶⁹ Rahner, TI 1, 98.

¹⁷⁰ Rahner, TI, 11, 87.

¹⁷¹ Rahner, TI 9, 28.

Infused Grace and Created Grace

Torrance states there is a

deep and subtle element of Pelagianism in the Roman doctrine of grace, as it emerges in its notion of the Church (to use modern terminology) as the extension of the Incarnation or the prolongation of Redemption, or in its doctrine of the Priesthood as mediating salvation not only from the side of God toward man but from the side of man toward God.¹⁷²

Torrance maintains that from the Reformed perspective, human ministry represents Christ by acting on his authority, but "it does not represent the people, for only Christ can take man's place, and act for man before the Father. In other words, it rejects the notion of created grace or connatural grace, both in its understanding of salvation and in its understanding of the ministry."¹⁷³ There is not enough space here to present an entire development of these ideas. It is enough to note where this thinking finally leads.

Torrance claims that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there was a "medieval synthesis" following the Augustinian tradition using realist Aristotelian terms that was tainted by a nominalistic view "of definable, controllable grace, which we find in Gratian for example, with the realist notion of conferring or causing grace *physice ex opere operato*."¹⁷⁴ This perspective was based on an Augustinian idea of a "sacramental universe" and finally led to the notion that there was "an inherent relation between logical forms and the nature of the truth."¹⁷⁵ In this context, medieval theology developed a view of the relationship between God and creatures in such a way that "even the revelation of God in Christ was interpreted within this system." Unfortunately, this approach "tended to mean that revelation was used to fill out a conception of being established independently on

¹⁷² Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 176.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 177.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

the ground of natural theology."¹⁷⁶ On this basis, when the Church was then regarded as an extension of the incarnation, "the institutional Church was held to represent in its forms and dogmas the objectification of the truth in its institutional and rational structure ... It was on this ground that the Church itself came to assume supreme authority, for the expression of the mind of the Church in its dogmatic definitions was held to be the expression of the nature of the Truth."¹⁷⁷ It will be recalled that Torrance opposed this view because it substitutes *logical truth* rather than the *truth of being* in its identity with Christ himself as Lord of the church for the truth itself. The effect of this thinking meant, among other things, that "grace came to be regarded from a more ontological point of view" as "a divine power at work in human being transforming and changing it invisibly" so that it was understood as "grace actualizing itself within the physical as well as the spiritual, metaphysically heightening and exalting creaturely existence."¹⁷⁸ Grace thus came to be seen as "a divine causation, and there follows from it a divine effect in the creature. It is almost like a supernatural potency that is infused into human beings," which inheres in one's soul, lifting us to a vision of God. That, Torrance says, is the "notion of *created grace*, grace actualizing itself in the creature and elevating it to supernatural existence, *ontological grace* at work in man's very being and raising him to a higher ontological order."¹⁷⁹

Torrance's main objection here is to the idea of *causality*, which he says "appears to import a confusion between Creator and the creature; and to think of grace as deifying man or heightening his being until he attains the level of a supernatural order."¹⁸⁰ But that Torrance says seems to "do docetic violence to creaturely human nature."¹⁸¹ Torrance notes that this problem does not just appear in Roman Catholicism but takes the form of theology lapsing into anthropology and subjectivism in Protestant theology with notions of "co-operation and co-

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 178.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 179.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 180.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

redemption.” In this context, Torrance conveys his key point by applying the *homoousion* to his view of grace. This application of the *homoousion* eliminates both the medieval “proliferation of *graces*” and “the notion of grace as a detachable quality which could be made to inhere in creaturely being.”¹⁸² Torrance asserts, “the doctrine of *created grace* could only be regarded as a species of Arianism.”¹⁸³ So when he says that in Christ, the Gift (grace) and the Giver are one, he means that the self-communication that meets us in Christ is God himself in the Person of his Son, who is one in being with the Father and the Spirit. That means that grace is nothing other than God himself personally communicating with us.

The Gift and the Giver are one. Grace is not something that can be detached from God and made to inhere in creaturely being as ‘created grace’; nor is it something that can be proliferated in many forms; nor is it something that we can have more or less of, as if grace could be construed in quantitative terms ... Grace is whole and indivisible because it is identical with the personal self-giving of God to us in his Son. It is identical with Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁴

As noted above, there is no doubt that Rahner and Dych also wanted to speak of grace as God communicating himself personally to us and not as a thing transmitted to us. This intention to speak of grace as God’s personal self-communication led Dych to assert that “Rahner offers a way to return to the more personal and more immediately religious understanding of grace in Scripture and the Fathers by thinking of grace not just as a created effect of God’s efficient causality, but, based on an analogy with the immediate presence of God in the beatific vision, as God’s actual presence and indwelling through a mode of quasi-formal causality.”¹⁸⁵ Within this perspective, Dych notes that “the supernatural existential asserts that God in his own personal Spirit is present throughout all of history, and that human beings in all of their human encounters are also

¹⁸² Ibid., 182.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 182-3.

¹⁸⁵ Dych, 39.

encountering God."¹⁸⁶ With his notion of the supernatural existential then Rahner uses the notion of "quasi-formal causality" to explain that God has made himself an intrinsic principle of human transcendental. Thus, while Rahner, like Torrance, wants to say that God communicates himself and not just something to us, the problem appears in his belief that "In a *quasi-formal* causality he really and in the strictest sense of the word bestows *himself*."¹⁸⁷ Rahner uses the word "quasi" to preserve the freedom of God acting causally in this way.¹⁸⁸

Conceptualized in this way, however, Rahner says God's "self-communication" signifies "that God in his own most proper reality makes himself the inner-most constitutive element of man"¹⁸⁹ so that "God's offer of himself belongs to all men and is a characteristic of man's transcendence and his transcendental" and "cannot by simple and individual acts of reflection ... be differentiated from those basic structures of human transcendence."¹⁹⁰ For Rahner, then our transcendental knowledge "which is present always and everywhere in the actualization of the human spirit in knowledge and freedom, but present unthematically, is a moment which must be distinguished from verbal and propositional revelation as such."¹⁹¹ Nonetheless, Rahner claims this still must be understood as God's self-revelation. In his words, "This transcendental moment in revelation is a modification of our transcendental consciousness produced permanently by God in grace. But such a modification is really an original and permanent element in our consciousness as the basic and original luminosity of our existence. And as an element in our transcendental which is constituted by God's self-communication, it is already revelation in the proper sense."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 36.

¹⁸⁸ Rahner, TI 1, 330-1.

¹⁸⁹ Rahner, FCF, 116.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 129.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 149.

¹⁹² Ibid.

The difference between Torrance and Rahner here is enormous because Torrance identifies grace with Christ himself as the *truth of being* while Rahner thinks "it is only possible to speak of this grace in a meaningful way at all within a transcendental anthropological context."¹⁹³ From this, Rahner concludes that "grace is God himself in self-communication, grace is not a 'thing' but—as communicated grace—a conditioning of the spiritual and intellectual subject as such to a direct relationship with God."¹⁹⁴ Thus, grace "can only be understood from the point of view of the subject, with his transcendental nature, experienced as a being-in-reference to the reality of absolute truth and free-ranging, infinite, absolutely valid love. It can only be understood in one's innermost regions as an immediacy before the absolute mystery of God."¹⁹⁵ How is this different from Torrance's view? It is different, in that at the most critical point in his reflections Rahner turns to the human subject to understand grace, instead of turning to Christ who is the grace of God acting for us in his unconditional love of us. So Rahner and Dych can then claim that human beings in all their human encounters are encountering God. That conclusion, unfortunately, ends up ascribing grace directly to everyone in their transcendental experiences as the goal of such experiences which can be equated with absolute truth without identifying that truth with Jesus Christ himself who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In this way, grace is detached from the Giver of grace and sought within our depth experiences in a manner similar to the approaches of Tillich, Robinson, and Bultmann, as discussed above.

Grace is Identical with Jesus Christ

The very idea that God's grace, which cannot be separated from Christ the Giver of grace, might be understood as the basic and original luminosity of our existence makes grace indistinguishable from our very existence, as Torrance has already suggested. This conclusion confuses the Creator and the creature by thinking *causally* about grace instead of understanding grace exclusively as God's personal actions of love toward us in his Word and Spirit. The proof of this confusion can be

¹⁹³ Rahner, TI 9, 36.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

seen in the comments of Stephen Duffy, who writes that "Grace, therefore, is experienced though not as grace, for it is psychologically indistinguishable from the stirrings of human transcendental."¹⁹⁶ Here, the problem of unthematic or non-conceptual knowledge of God rears its ugly head in connection with knowledge of God's grace. One cannot speak of grace in its identity with Christ the Giver of grace without conceptual knowledge of Christ as God himself acting for us here and now through the power of his Holy Spirit. So, the statement that grace can be experienced, "though not as grace," raises the question of what exactly we are then experiencing, if it is not God's coming to us in Christ! Moreover, to claim that grace can or should be understood psychologically rather than theologically with the result that it is "indistinguishable from the stirrings of human transcendental" clearly implies that creatures in their transcendental experiences cannot be clearly distinguished from God present to them and even indwelling them in his Word and Spirit.

All these difficulties result from the failure to recognize and maintain that grace simply cannot be detached from the Giver of grace without spoiling its proper theological meaning. Let me give one practical example of the problems with Rahner's transcendental method here as it relates to God's self-revelation. Because he conceptualizes grace and revelation by equating them with our transcendental experiences, he does not begin and end his thinking about the resurrection with the crucified and risen Lord himself as Torrance invariably does. So, Rahner claims that,

If one has a radical hope of attaining a definitive identity and does not believe that one can steal away with one's obligations into the emptiness of non-existence, one has already grasped and accepted the resurrection in its real content ... The absoluteness of the radical hope in which a human being apprehends his or her total existence as destined and empowered to reach definitive form can quite properly be regarded as grace, which permeates this existence always and everywhere. This grace is revelation in the strictest sense ... this certainly is revelation, even if this is not envisaged as coming from

¹⁹⁶ Stephen Duffy, "Experience of Grace," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 48.

'outside.'¹⁹⁷

All of Rahner's presuppositions are here on display. Instead of pointing us directly to the risen Lord who alone is the object of our faith and hope and is thus himself the enabling condition of our knowledge of eternal life, Rahner directs us to our hope for some sort of "definitive identity." In that way, he thinks we already grasp the real content of the resurrection. That is simply untrue. As Torrance insists, "the incarnation and resurrection force themselves upon our minds" with the result that "in the life and work of Jesus Christ we are confronted with an ultimate self-revelation of God into the truth of which there is no way of penetrating from what we already know or believe we know, far less of establishing or verifying it on grounds that are outside it."¹⁹⁸ And that truth claims us by claiming

the unreserved fidelity of our minds. It is no blind act of faith that is required, divorced from any recognition of credibility, for the reality of the incarnation or the resurrection is the kind of objectivity which makes itself accessible to our apprehension, creating the condition for its recognition and acceptance, that is, in such a way that belief on our part is the subjective pole of commitment to objective reality, but intelligent commitment to an objectively intelligible reality which is to be grasped only through a repentant rethinking and structural

¹⁹⁷ Karl Rahner and Karl-Heinz Weger, *Our Christian Faith: Answers for the Future*, trans. Francis McDonagh (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 110-11. Envisioning the resurrection in this abstract fashion led Rahner to make a statement that Torrance never would make, namely, "the knowledge of man's resurrection given with his transcendently necessary hope is a statement of philosophical anthropology even before any real revelation in the Word" (Rahner, TI 17, 18).

¹⁹⁸ Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 18.

recasting of all our preconceptions.¹⁹⁹

Torrance here does not just refer to our hope for some vague definitive end as Rahner did. Torrance here is claiming that the very meaning of Christian hope is determined by the fact that Christ has risen from the dead and is coming again. He says, "*The raising of the Christ is the act of God, whose significance is not to be compared with any event before or after. It is the primal datum of theology, from which there can be no abstracting, and the normative presupposition for every valid dogmatic judgment and for the meaningful construction of a Christian theology.*"²⁰⁰ For Torrance, "The resurrection cannot be detached from Christ himself, and considered as a phenomenon on its own to be compared and judged in the light of other phenomena."²⁰¹ Thus, for Torrance, our hope as Christian hope, is shaped by the fact that Jesus, who rose bodily from the dead, now lives eternally as the

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 18-19. Illustrating the fact that if knowledge of God begins with an ill-conceived view of humanity it will lead to a misunderstanding of both God and humanity Torrance frequently argues that it is precisely the *homoousion* that "does not allow us indiscriminately to read back into God what is human and finite" *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 99. Scientific theology he says cuts "away any mythological projection of ideas of our own devising into God" (ibid.). He maintains that while it is not always easy to distinguish objective "states of affairs from subjective states of affairs," since we constantly tend to get in the way because of our "self-centredness," it is still important to do so in all areas of reflection (ibid.). But in theology it is more difficult because "due to our deep-rooted sin and selfishness we are alienated from God in our minds, and need to be reconciled to him. Hence ... a repentant rethinking of what we have already claimed to know and a profound reorganisation of our consciousness are required of us in knowing God, as was made clear by Jesus when calling for disciples he insisted that they must renounce themselves and take up their cross in following him" (ibid., 100). Torrance believes it is only by holding together the unity between the economic activity of God in the Spirit and in the Son "that we may be prevented from reading back into God himself the material or creaturely images (e.g. latent in human father-son relations) ... creaturely images naturally latent in the forms of thought and speech employed by divine revelation to us are made to refer transparently or in a diaphanous way to God without being projected into his divine Nature" (ibid., 101). We must therefore exercise "critical discernment of what we may read back from the incarnation into God and what we may not read back into him" Thomas F. Torrance, "The Christian Apprehension of God the Father," in Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., ed. *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 137. We may not read the kind of sonship we experience on earth back into God because "we cannot project the creaturely relations inherent in human sonship into the Creator. Nor, of course, can we read gender back into God, for gender belongs to creatures only" (ibid.).

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 74.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 46.

ascended Lord and promises us a share in that eternal life. The empty tomb points to the fact that he rose bodily from the dead and that he himself, as the incarnate and risen Lord, is the one who enables our hope for eternal life and enables us to live as new creatures in him. Torrance does not refer to the resurrection in some vague way as our hope for something definitive that can be understood apart from the risen Lord himself. It certainly cannot be understood from our radical hope of attaining a definitive identity as Rahner claimed.²⁰²

The most important point here is that because Rahner consistently detaches grace from Christ the Giver of grace, he can explain hope from our transcendental experiences of hope instead of exclusively from understanding Christ himself as the risen Lord who alone enables hope for eternal life and enables us to live as part of the new creation through union with Christ. Rahner here equates grace with our radical hope, which he thinks can be explained from philosophical anthropology and then theologically. So naturally enough, he thinks this grace permeates our existence and can also be regarded as God's revelation, which does not have to come from outside us. But the truth is that God's self-revelation and grace cannot be detached from Christ the incarnate, risen, ascended, and coming Lord, and thus must come to us from him and thus from beyond our experiences of hope and in contrast to any logical view of hope grounded in transcendental experience conceived philosophically or theologically. All of Rahner's thinking here is confirmed when he claims that self-acceptance is the same as accepting Christ. Hence, "Anyone therefore, no matter how remote from any revelation formulated in words, who accepts his existence, that is, his humanity ... says yes to Christ, even when he does not know that he does ... Anyone who accepts his own humanity in full ... has accepted the son of Man..."²⁰³ The only way this could be true is if one had confused nature and grace utilizing the supernatural existential so that self-acceptance is then equated with acceptance of Christ. The problem here is that, as Torrance

²⁰² It is no accident that when Rahner speaks of Christ's resurrection he refers to "his achieved finality that we describe as his resurrection" (TI 18, 145). The clear implication is that it is not the risen Lord himself risen bodily from the dead who is the sole object of reflection but some sort of vague "achieved finality" that we choose to describe as resurrection!

²⁰³ TI 4:119.

claims, one cannot detach atonement from the incarnation and resurrection. If incarnation is not detached from atonement, then it will be seen that it is only by turning *from* ourselves as the sinners we are apart from Christ, and turning *toward* him as the one in whom our enmity to God is overcome, that we can live as those who are justified by grace alone and thus through union with Christ alone.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by noting how Dych defends Rahner's position as a strictly theological position. He argues once again that Rahner uses his philosophy to explain his theology but that his starting point is a "conviction of faith," that is,

'a strictly theological proposition'. In this instance the faith conviction is rooted in the scriptural assertion of God's universal saving will, and in the belief that if God truly wishes the salvation of all, then it must be a concrete possibility for everyone. One way, although obviously not the only way, of understanding grace as a universal possibility is to understand it as an existential in human life. Philosophy serves theology's task of seeking an understanding of faith in the sense in which Anselm defined theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding.²⁰⁴

It is precisely here that Torrance's view of Anselm and Dych's view of Anselm radically differ. Torrance flatly rejects any idea of unthematic and non-objective or non-conceptual knowledge of God, Christ, revelation, and grace, claiming with Anselm that we cannot have experience of God, belief in God or knowledge of God without concepts: "*fides esse nequit sine conceptione*."²⁰⁵ Thus, for Torrance, knowledge of God comes to us through our knowledge of God the Father, who we know through union with his incarnate Son in faith. Any other view, Torrance claimed, would end with mythological projection from us as human subjects instead of with objective knowledge of the Trinity grounded in God's economic trinitarian self-revelation. Torrance held this view because he maintained that "our knowing of

²⁰⁴ Dych, 39.

²⁰⁵ Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 170 and "Truth and Authority," 228.

God is grounded in his knowing of us.”²⁰⁶ That means that “when we speak of God as Father, therefore, we are not using the term ‘Father’ in a transferred, improper, or inadequate sense; we are using it in its completely proper sense, which is determined by the intrinsic Fatherhood of God himself.”²⁰⁷

So, when Dych speaks of faith seeking understanding, he claims that if God wills to save all, then salvation must be a concrete possibility for everyone. It is, of course—but the possibility is in the reality of God acting for all people in his incarnate Word and through his Holy Spirit and this cannot be universalized by equating it with something that is supposedly present in each person in the depth of their experiences of self-transcendence. However, with Rahner, Dych holds that “God-talk makes sense and can point to its roots in experience” with the transcendental Thomist view that such God-talk “is always through the world of our objective, historical experience and as an element *within* that experience. God, however, is not encountered as one object among others in that world, but as the deepest dimension of all our encounters.”²⁰⁸ It is exactly here that Dych turns once again to Rahner’s view that knowledge of God is not knowledge of an “object which happens to present itself directly or indirectly from outside” because such knowledge has the character of “a transcendental experience.”²⁰⁹ From this he concludes with Rahner’s own words that “insofar as this subjective, non-objective luminosity of the subject in its transcendence is always orientated toward the holy mystery, the knowledge of God is always present unthematically and without name, and not just when we begin to speak of it.”²¹⁰

Nevertheless, as discussed above, if Torrance is right, and I think he is, then we can only know God as the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to the extent that we rely exclusively upon the grace of God, which meets us in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. When that occurs, we then know God’s name while

²⁰⁶ Torrance, “The Christian Apprehension of God the Father,” 137.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Dych, 44.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. Dych is citing Rahner, FCF, 21.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

simultaneously knowing that, apart from grace, which meets us in judgment and forgiveness in Christ, we are at enmity with God and not oriented toward him as some generally known "holy mystery." We also know that while the Christian God is holy and a mystery, that does not mean that we have true knowledge of the Trinity just by referring to God as a holy mystery that can be known from an experience of the nameless. God in Christ is not nameless but has a name, and that is the name into which Christians are baptized.

Consequently, the point of this article is to illustrate that there can be genuine union between Catholic and Protestant theologians regarding knowledge of God, revelation, and grace if and to the extent that both sides are willing to begin and end their theologies with Jesus Christ alone and with the justification that comes to humanity in and through him alone. So, instead of claiming that self-acceptance means accepting God, which it does not, one would have to point to Christ himself as the sole possibility and reality of salvation for the human race and for the whole world. This means that true knowledge of God really does involve knowledge of a definite object, namely, the triune God who makes himself known to us through union with Christ and thus with the Father in faith. Such knowledge does not refer to some nameless reality found in universal human depth experiences but to that particular object which can be experienced and known only as Christ himself is allowed to disclose himself to us through the power of his Holy Spirit. In this way, instead of retreating from the *truth of being*, with the idea of God as the nameless which is identified from a transcendental experience, we may know the truth of God's being from an encounter with his Word and Spirit and thus know God as the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.