

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THOMAS F. TORRANCE AND THE COPTIC CHURCH:

A Bridge to Ecumenism

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Abstract: *This chapter explores the connections between the theology of Thomas F. Torrance and the tradition of the Coptic Church, particularly focusing on how these traditions contribute to ecumenical dialogue. Torrance's Christocentric approach and his recognition of the limitations of human language in expressing divine truths allows him to insightfully engage with Alexandrian theological thought, despite his lack of direct exposure to the modes of thinking indigenous to ancient Egypt. In contrast with the prevailing dualist perspectives in Western theology, his theological reflections embrace a non-dualist, unitary perspective paralleling those of early Alexandrian Church Fathers, including Clement, Origen, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria. Considering his theological framework, Torrance's insights align with contemporary Coptic theologians such as Fr. Matthew the Poor and Bishop Gregorios, stressing the importance of a unified reality in Christ. Torrance's theological synthesis invites a deeper, more inclusive ecumenical dialogue between Christian traditions, especially fostering an ecumenical bridge between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches, underscoring the significance of the miaphysite understanding of Christology, in which Christ's divine and human natures are united in one reality without confusion, separation, or change.*

1. Introduction

This essay is dedicated to starting a conversation with the legacy and theology of Thomas Forsyth Torrance, a remarkable Scottish theologian of the Reformation whose theology was able to capture many characteristics of indigenous Egyptian thought without knowing it. Torrance had a strong intuition — based on his meticulous examination of the Alexandrian tradition and his intellectual freedom to allow a tradition to speak for itself — regarding distinctive characteristics that set Alexandrian authors apart from other Christian thinkers. Despite his lack of exposure to ancient Egyptian modes of thinking, where Alexandrian thought was indigenously formed and developed, he could see specific trends that distinguish Clement, Origen, Didymus, Athanasius, and Cyril from other Christian thinkers. His intuitions and conclusions were often aborted by the discouragements of his contemporaries, as will become clear in this essay. Nonetheless, Torrance was able to process a large part of his theology through the contours that he intuitively saw in Alexandrian theology, and this set him apart as one of the most significant theologians of the twentieth century. This unique ability initiated a bridge of substantial ecumenical significance, essentially translating for Western scholarship the particularity of Alexandrian thought and its epistemological foundations, paving the way for a solid foundation for dialogue which invites ecumenical reflections outside the boundaries of common narratives.

This essay will engage with Torrance's vision of human thought, the epistemological basis for different worldviews, and their contribution to the broader theological discourse. Subsequently, this essay will highlight specific features that Torrance was able to glean from the Alexandrian tradition but grappled with language and the precise context to relate and articulate them. Furthermore, it will illustrate Torrance's correct reading of the Alexandrian fathers and the implications of such reading on his theology. Specifically, his understanding of the meaning of reality, the essence/energy distinction, his understanding of salvation within the context of exchange of properties, his disagreement with the Tome of Leo, and the *en/anhypostatic* distinction. Additionally, this essay will illustrate the proximity of thought between Torrance and two contemporary Coptic theologians: Fr. Matthew the Poor and Bishop Gregorios. Special attention will also be given to some aspects

where Torrance and Coptic theology hold differing theological views. Finally, this essay will briefly outline further considerations for ecumenism and theology based on this engagement.

2. Torrance's Christocentric Empirical Ethos

Torrance understood the transcendence of Christ above all human language and categories of thought. He explains, "Let us not forget, however, that all our human language as such is inadequate to express divine and eternal truth. All theological speech about God is to a degree 'improper'."¹ He further argues, "it is not easy to ask true questions of God because no question that we can frame is adequate to Him, yet it is not a wrong question because it falls short of Him. But there can be little doubt that many of the difficulties that have been injected into modern theology are due to a real failure to ask the right questions."² Any human-divine encounter is primarily experiential and personal and secondarily involves theological reflection. The transition from the experiential realm to reflective categories in order to express this encounter is certainly bound by human exposure to philosophy, language, and science. Furthermore, the experiential cannot be simply reduced to the reflective, and any expression can never encapsulate the totality of the encounter, let alone any claim of monopoly over the totality of divine revelation. In recognizing this, Torrance concludes: "If language about God does not really repose upon an objective revelation of God and is not grounded in an objective reality beyond us, it must be deflected to have only an oblique meaning in ourselves and is to be interpreted only as a symbolic form of human self-expression."³ This understanding, in turn, led Torrance to apprehend a larger framework that circumscribes the diversity of thought, and its importance, in developing the consensus by which various members of the body of Christ express the divine encounter. It is within this context that Torrance developed his appreciation of the *miaphysite* expression of faith, and it is also precisely from this

¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 32.

² Thomas F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 53.

³ *Ibid.*, 50.

point that we need to engage in ecumenical dialogue between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches.

3. Torrance's Understanding of the Development and Ways of Human Thought

Before critically engaging with Torrance's theology in dialogue with that of the Coptic Church, we must define the distinct cosmological, ethnic, and epistemological models that will circumscribe this assessment of Torrance. As described by Torrance, these are three different layers that interweave to shape human thought throughout history.

i. Cosmological: Ptolemaic, Newtonian, and Einsteinian Models

The first layer is cosmological, where the Ptolemaic, Newtonian, and Einsteinian cosmological models are the underpinning of human cosmological thought and have, to a great extent, repeatedly changed and shaped Christian dogma.⁴

Ptolemaic cosmology consists of a sharp dualism where there is disjunction between terrestrial mechanics and celestial mechanics. This cosmological model seeks to escape the terrestrial material reality into the celestial ethereal reality,⁵ lending to a gnostic worldview that despised material as a lower state of being and sought to ascend to the heights of celestial ethereal existence.⁶ The Ptolemaic model was used by Augustine as the basis of his intelligible versus sensible theology⁷ and upon which the totality of Roman Catholic and later Protestant dualistic theology stands.⁸ This, in turn, paved the way for the seemingly dualistic understanding of Christology at the Council of Chalcedon developed and articulated

⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology: Consonance between Theology and Science* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia/Belfast: Christian Journals, 1980), 72.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *De Libero Arbitrio* II.7 and *Confessions* XI.xxxix.39.

⁸ Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 61.

by Pope Leo, the student of Augustine.⁹ Indeed, Torrance found that: "The tragedy of the Chalcedonian formula in the history of thought is that it soon became caught in the rising tide of Byzantine and Augustinian dualism, already evident in the teaching of Leo the Great; and it was from that dualist interpretation of Chalcedonian Christology that John Philoponos, whose Christological writings will be of great importance to our discussion, was castigated as 'monophysite.' But the ancient Chalcedonian formula can be resurrected today and re-interpreted in a non-dualist framework of thought."¹⁰

Later, after Newton established a distinction between the absolute and the relative, we find the same kind of dualism entering Christian theology.¹¹ For example, Newton discussed the concept of inertia, which further shaped the already dualistic Western mind to think that the world is not contained in God and thus, God would have to act inertially upon the universe by imposing rationality from the outside.¹²

The last cosmological model is Einstein's non-dualist model, established on the epistemological interactionist assimilation of ontological and theoretical knowledge.¹³ In other words, it is a model in which there is an interactive and existential unity between heaven and earth. Torrance notes that this model "operates with the very basic ideas that classical Christian theology produced" at the hands of the church fathers.¹⁴ It is through this lens that Torrance reads and interprets various church fathers like Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria. Additionally, he also uses this model to evaluate the Christological statements of John Philoponos, noting that "to study the thought of John Philoponos along with

⁹ Ibid. See also Bernard Green, *The Soteriology of Leo the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 120.

¹⁰ Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 127.

¹¹ Ibid., 23.

¹² Ibid., 147.

¹³ Ibid., 72.

¹⁴ Ibid.

that of Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria and Severus of Antioch will be an immense boon for the rebuilding of a distinctively Christian outlook upon the world today.”¹⁵

ii. Ethnic: Greek, Roman, Hebrew, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian

The second layer is the ethnic layer. Here, Torrance saw three primary ways of thinking that historically shaped and continue to shape human scientific thought. Torrance argues that modern science “acquires its basic habits of thought from the cultural traditions that derive from the Greeks and the Romans, and indeed from the Hebrews.”¹⁶ He goes on to illustrate that through the Greeks, we learn to think in terms of the pattern of things, forms, and the science of observation.¹⁷ Additionally, the way of the Romans, he argues, highlighted for us law, order, and administration. The Romans “were concerned with ways and means, with getting things done, with management and control of resources, armies and supplies, and of public life.”¹⁸ The Hebrews, Torrance adds, highlight for us relationality and encounter of persons. He explains, “it is the kind of thinking which we find in the Bible, when we learn and know through listening and responding, by serving and obeying.”¹⁹ Torrance described the cultures he was exposed to through Western academia.

However, and for the purpose of engaging in a more comprehensive ecumenical discussion with Torrance’s work, I would like to add two more distinct foundational ancient ethnic traditions for a more holistic perspective. First is the way of the Egyptians, and second, the Mesopotamians. The distinct way of thinking found in the ancient Egyptian traditions highlights a mystical and ontological reality where Egyptians are standing at the edge of life, trying to grasp the concrete reality that is beyond it. This was based on ancient Egyptian categories of thought that include a unity between heaven and earth, piety and decorum, the imminent advent

¹⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological and Natural Science* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 99.

¹⁶ Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 14.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

of God, and the proto-eschatological axis of reality.²⁰ The proto-eschatological axis of unitary reality is best described as the cult of the afterlife, as evident from ancient Egyptian history. All aspects of life revolve around the afterlife, the tombs, the pyramids, the temples, the coffins, and mystical texts that speak to God and life after death. Monuments representing the afterlife and worship related to the afterlife in Ancient Egypt far eclipse other archaeological discoveries there, and indeed, other archaeological findings related to palaces, schools, or marketplaces are often referenced or are found in the context of celebrating the afterlife. Indeed, the most prominent remains were purposefully built to prepare for the life to come.

The second ancient traditional model that should be added is that of the Mesopotamians, which highlights the sense of wonder. This is evident in the poetic nature of Mesopotamian history and specifically its rich tradition utilizing poetry as a vessel for expressing their wonder and admiration of the inexplicable through paradox. This is evident across the ancient poetic texts of Enuma Elish, and the later poetic tradition of Aphrahat, Ephrem the Syrian, and Jacob of Serug.²¹

While Torrance is correct that we need to collect and recognize the various distinct ways of thinking found in ancient traditions in order to populate “our modern habits of thought,”²² a fuller picture is found if we add the Egyptian and Mesopotamian traditions to the three he discussed, namely the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews. For example, the way of the Greeks, through observation, advances the sciences. The way of the Romans, through law and order, advances our legal structures and modern politics and thus extends into the organization and logistical demands of civil infrastructure. The way of the Hebrews, through relationality, advances societal interactions, our human relations, and perhaps, therefore, our

²⁰ These categories were developed and critically discussed by the author as part of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Aberdeen: Emmanuel Gergis, “Coptic Epistemology and the Unitary φύσις of Christ: Preserving Alexandrian Particularity” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 2020).

²¹ Sebastian P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 14–15. More information on the characteristics of this tradition can be found in the extensive scholarship on Syriac Christianity developed by Sebastian Brock.

²² Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 15.

economic structures. The way of the Mesopotamians advances artistic expression. Finally, the way of the Egyptians advances our faith, piety, and encounter with the otherworldly or miracles. Remarkably, these five modes of thinking and perceiving the world correspond locationally to the five ancient Christian centers: Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch. While there was some overlap between their ways of thinking, each seemed to have one mode that was more prominently the driving force for that culture. Providentially, in this extraordinary diversity of thought, perhaps the Holy Spirit was working and crowning the work of Christ through the consensus of these diverse expressions to form a oneness of faith. Five modes of expression that confirm and point towards a unified reality of God through experience. This makes it possible for humanity to reach the pinnacle of its potential to be in the image and likeness of God, namely a diversity in unity.

iii. Epistemological: The Dualist, the Monist and the Unitary

Through the interwoven relations between the cosmological and ethnic models defined by Torrance, there arises a third layer that bears noting; that of epistemology. In this model, there are three main ways of thinking: the dualist, the monist, and the unitary. The Western world "has been imprisoned for more than a thousand years in the dungeon of a dualist frame of thought."²³ Torrance notes that dualism is "prevalent not only in theology, but also in Western science, philosophy, culture and society at all levels in different forms: cosmological, anthropological, philosophical, cultural, phenomenological, epistemological, deistic and so on."²⁴ He sees that this kind of dualism is a byproduct of the Greek way of thinking going back to Plato and Aristotle. As the West was only exposed to this kind of reasoning, Torrance affirms:

By and large the dualist outlook of later, Neoplatonic Hellenism came to prevail and was given its most enduring and masterful expression in the Augustinian culture of Western Christendom. Here God and the world, heaven and earth, the eternal and the temporal, were so sharply separated that great attempts were made to clamp them

²³ Kye Won Lee, *Living in Union with Christ: The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 9.

²⁴ Ibid.

together; and so with the help of resurrected Aristotelian philosophy and science, a great synthesis emerged in which theology and science were intimately connected with one another in a united, rational outlook upon God and the world.²⁵

This Western dualism gave rise not just to Augustinian dualism, but also Cartesian, Newtonian, and Kantian.²⁶ Specifically, Torrance observes that “the platonic Augustinian dualism between the intelligible and sensible realms that was latent in Lutheran theology, not least in its schematic distinction between ‘the two kingdoms’, the Cartesian dualism between subject and object, and the Greek antithesis between idea and event that was revived through the Kantian distinction between noumenal ‘things in themselves’ and phenomenal ‘things for us’.”²⁷ Moreover, he notes that this dualism:

took its definitive shape through the thought of Kant and Descartes or of Newton and Galileo, but it goes back through the Christian centuries to the foundations of classical Western culture in Greece. I refer here to the irreducible dualisms in the philosophy and cosmology of Plato and Aristotle, which threw into sharp contrast rectilinear motion in terrestrial mechanics and circular motion in celestial mechanics, which were related to the dualisms between the empirical and the theoretical, the physical and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal, the mortal and the divine.²⁸

Torrance further explains that “Aristotle had posited four fundamental questions in all scientific knowledge, but by medieval times these had been reduced to three, *quid sit*, *an sit*, and *quale sit*, asked in that order. *Quid sit* is the question as to the ‘what’ or the essence of a thing; *an sit* is the question as to the ‘how’ or possibility of a thing; while *quale sit* is the question as to the actual nature of a thing. Asked in that order, they were questions that began with abstraction and possibility and

²⁵ Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 22.

²⁶ Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 103.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁸ Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 21.

then went on to actuality."²⁹ Using this line of questioning in theological inquiry by positing them to God results in serious consequences. Torrance argues that "in order to know God we do not 'torment' Him as we do nature before it will disclose its secrets to us."³⁰ In a sense, we can only interrogate that which does not reveal itself, which is ultimately not true of Christ. He further explains the difference between applying these questions to nature as opposed to God. Torrance argues that we use a specific set of questions when we interrogate a reality to reveal itself when it is irrational and unable to reveal itself; however, in encountering God, we are faced with a self-revealing being and therefore our mode of inquiry and the sort of questions we ask will be different.³¹

The inner being of theology is Christ by whose means theological inquiry is not interrogative but a conversation with a friend, a person, whose truth is revealed to us as much as our rational faculties can process. This means that, fundamentally, we must use a set of different questions than those employed by Plato and Aristotle.³² A more appropriate set of questions are those which are intrinsic to the Egyptian way of thinking. *Quid sit*, when applied within a relational context, becomes *quis est*, that is, a question as to the 'who'. Additionally, within the same context, *an sit* becomes *quare sit*, that is, a question as to 'why'. As described above, when Egyptians examine their world with these types of questions they do not ask about the nature of the sun, or what it is, but rather who does it represent and why does it cross the sky from east to west.³³ This is why, from an Egyptian perspective, when these epistemological questions are used in Chalcedon, Christ becomes an object, not a person or an ontologically relational reality. Indeed, using ancient Egyptian categories of thought, we see that Egyptians are not interested in asking Christ 'what he is', or 'how does he operate', to which the answer is, by observation, he is the God-man and he works through a human nature and a divine

²⁹ Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

³² *Ibid.*, 33.

³³ Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 9.

nature as erroneously expressed in the Tome of Leo. Egyptians are, instead, interested in asking Christ who he is and why he does all these things for our sake. To this, he quite simply provides the answer, 'I am God incarnate' and 'I came for you and your salvation,' as evident in Alexandrian authors such as Athanasius in his *De Incarnatione* and the Nicene Creed. This is a fundamental difference in theological method that resulted in the first major schism in Christian history.³⁴ It is the epistemological tension between the Hebrew-Egyptian-Mesopotamian way of thinking and the Greek-Roman way of thinking. Torrance recognizes this, noting that "Unfortunately, they became submerged in a massive upsurge of dualist modes of thought and the container notions of space in East and West, in Byzantine and Latin Christian cultures. To a large extent this was due to the powerful influence of Neoplatonic philosophy, with its reinterpretation of Plato and Aristotle (not least Aristotle's logic), and the survival of dualist stoic notions of law in the development of canon law."³⁵ This problem continued to torment Christian theology for centuries after Chalcedon in the Byzantine-Latinized traditions of Christendom.³⁶

Torrance's criticism and rejection of dualist way of thinking should in no way be read to suggest that he holds a monist perspective. The monist way of thinking

³⁴ An earlier significant schism within the Christian tradition was that which occurred in the Persian Church resulting from Nestorianism. Nestorius confessed two separate persons in the incarnate Logos and was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. This schism gave birth to the Church of the East in modern-day Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Despite the historical narrative, the Church of the East does not in reality follow a Nestorian definition of Christology. The confusion in Christological expressions arises due to the linguistic variations in understanding and precisely defining terminology like 'essence', 'nature', and 'person'. The Syriac terms used like 'itya', 'ituta', 'kyana', and 'qnome', do not denote the same understanding as the Greek terms. In fact, much of the points raised in this research about the Christology of the Coptic Church can be applied to the Church of the East as they too espouse a different worldview which impacts their use of language. Today, opprobriously, just as the Coptic Church is called 'monophysite', the Church of the East is referred to as 'Nestorian'. For more information on how the Church of the East defines its own theology and worldview, see Metropolitan Aprem Mooken, "Is the theology of the Assyrian Church Nestorian?" *Pro Oriente*, Syriac Dialogue, First Non-official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition, Paper presented by Metropolitan Mar Aprem G. Mooken, Vienna June 1994. Additionally, see "The Church of the East is not Nestorian," a paper presented by H. B. Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako at Christologie-Kirchen Ostens-ökumenische Dialoge (Frankfurt, Germany 22 September 2017).

³⁵ Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 60–61.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

takes two different entities, for example, God and his creation, and confounds them, rendering neither of them recognizable, leading to the erroneous theological discourse where there is no distinction between God and his creation. Monism presupposes that the differing entities do not retain any of their particularities and are not in a union of diversity, but rather are combined into a mixture which produces a third, different entity. Another potential result of monist thinking is reductionism, where two differing aspects, for example, the humanity and divinity of Christ, are reduced into whichever of them appears to be stronger, but ultimately leads to the consumption of the seemingly 'weaker' entity, leading to monophysitism where the humanity of Christ is completely absorbed by his divinity.

The third mode of thinking is the unitary perspective, in which two inherently different entities form a unity and become one reality. Kye Won Lee notes that the concept of union or integration is central to Torrance's whole thought. As an interactionist, he holds an integrative, non-dualist or unitary (not monist) mode of thinking, which discards dualist assumptions and abstractions which have refracted, distorted and obstructed the intrinsically-ontological relation between the two poles. This unitary view is an "integrating, onto-relational approach operating with a natural fusion of form and being."³⁷ This means that for Torrance, realism is defined "in terms of [a] non-dualist or unitary view."³⁸ Realist theology is, therefore, rooted in the union between form and being, the signs and what they signify, where "we encounter the inner rationality of the objective reality"³⁹ or what is known as *kata physin*. For example, "Torrance finds the real meaning of biblical statements 'not in themselves but in what they intend.'"⁴⁰ This is precisely the same claim made by Origen which is erroneously characterized by classical historiographers as allegorical and sometimes speculative. In light of Torrance's multilayered and thorough understanding of these three ways and modes of thinking, he was able to properly engage with Alexandrian thought, though he did not necessarily recognize its

³⁷ Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

proper source or place it within his framework of the overall human development of thought.

4. Torrance's View of Early Alexandrian Authors

While someone like Mark Edwards presents a compelling analysis of the historical Alexandrian intellectual culture,⁴¹ Torrance instinctively recognizes some of these indigenous characteristics of that culture. Moreover, Torrance goes further to utilize these aspects and advance a generally compelling, although not entirely complete, portrayal of Alexandrian theology, which helps break the prevailing notion that Alexandrians were Platonists. Specifically, Torrance was able, based on some of these native features, to construct more of a defined Christology founded on the Alexandrian patristic writings. In combining Torrance's account of Alexandrian Christology and inserting into it the indigenous Egyptian framework, it is now possible to recover the native identity of the Alexandrian Patristic tradition in a way that reclaims its particularity as compared to Hellenic thought. Therefore, it was important to first discuss the indigenous Egyptian framework, show how classical scholars generally viewed Alexandria and then attempt to discuss Christology through this new lens using Torrance's works as a starting point. This section will analyze Torrance's account of Alexandrian Patristic thought and teaching, starting with his understanding of Philo of Alexandria, due to Philo's apparent influence on some later Christian Alexandrian writers, and then advance the discussion to Clement, Origen, Athanasius, Cyril, and finally John Philoponos whose works were revived by Torrance.

i. Philo of Alexandria

To develop a complete view of Torrance's understanding on the Alexandrian frame of mind, a necessary starting point is a brief discussion of his reading of the prolific writings of Philo of Alexandria, an important Jewish figure who was born and

⁴¹ For full analysis, see Mark J. Edwards, *Origen Against Plato* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002). Also, "Late Antique Alexandria and the Orient," in *Beyond Conflicts: Cultural and Religious Cohabitations in Alexandria and Egypt between the 1st and the 6th Century CE*, Studien Und Texte Zu Antike Und Christentum; (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 103. Additionally, "Deification in the Alexandrian Tradition," in *Visions of God and Ideas on Deification in Patristic Thought*, ed. Mark Edwards and Elena Ene D-Vasilescu (London: Routledge, 2016).

lived in Alexandria and significantly impacted the Christian scene there.⁴² Similar to classical scholarship which evaluates Alexandrian authors based on Platonic dualism, Torrance notes: "Philo's understanding of the Scripture was part and parcel of his religious philosophy, for he distinguished in it a literal or external meaning which he referred to as the 'body' (σῶμα) and an inner meaning which he referred to as the 'soul' (ψυχή), the literal meaning being related like 'shadows' to 'the things that really exist'."⁴³ Although Torrance generally identified Philo's understanding of Scripture to encompass both literal and allegorical interpretations, yet in his later comments he states: "How Philo actually thought of the relation of the literal to the allegorical meaning is not always clear, for sometimes the literal sense seems to be left behind altogether."⁴⁴ Torrance uniquely recognized this particular relationship between Philo's understanding of the literal and the allegorical and it is not otherwise found in the classical reading of Philo.

Moreover, while some scholars accused Philo of indiscriminate dualism,⁴⁵ broadly categorizing his works as holding two radically different methods of interpretation can be only made on *prima facie* grounds and follows a more dualist method of evaluation. Upon further analysis, the relationship between the literal and the allegorical in Philo's mind hinges on seeking answers that will reveal the truth. In other words, in his attempt to see things for what they really are, Philo answers various questions presented to him by the occasional appropriation of literal or allegorical methods. Accordingly, a two-pronged approach to interpretation is not necessarily dualistic, but simply different methods within a truth-centric inquiry. His selection of which method to use is based on his need to articulate in the clearest way possible the essence of the truth, which to him is a natural gift of revelation. Torrance underlines this characteristic that is unique in Philo: "the purpose of allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, as far as Philo was

⁴² C. D. Yonge, trans., *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged, New Updated Edition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), xiii.

⁴³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 24.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Peder Borgen, "Philo of Alexandria - An Exegete for His Time," in *Philo of Alexandria - An Exegete for His Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 6.

concerned, was to establish their ἀλήθεια over against all mythology, and this meant for him the reality of God as God over against all anthropomorphic and geomorphic conceptions of him."⁴⁶ Ultimately, it is noteworthy that literal interpretation is at the essence of using anthropomorphic and geomorphic conceptions of God as they relate to the human experience, which historically has been the preferred method of interpretation by Latin and Greek commentators. It was only natural then that utilizing an allegorical method of interpretation might appear as an unreal experience to the Aristotelian mind.⁴⁷ While Torrance remained faithful to the classical characterization of Philo, he was unique in accenting Philo's focus on highlighting the truth of God against creaturely mythologies as well as identifying that his philosophy is rooted in his religious belief. In this assessment of Philo, Torrance is unwittingly recognizing and pointing to the ancient Egyptian category of the proto-eschatological axis of unitary reality and the fallen contour in relation to the concrete dimension of reality.

ii. Clement of Alexandria

In reading Torrance, it is impossible not to recognize the role that Clement of Alexandria plays in his understanding of the Alexandrian tradition. Torrance holds a non-classical view of Alexandrian hermeneutics, which is revealed in his evaluation of Clement. Specifically, Torrance claims that Clement describes a unitary model of faith and ascetic life of worship as an inseparable reality that is an essential characteristic of Alexandrian thought.⁴⁸ Torrance highlights this inseparable reality by emphasizing Clement's favorite biblical verse: "If you will not believe, you will not understand" (εάν μη πιστευσητε, ουδέ μη συνητε).⁴⁹ In Torrance's view, Clement believed that real knowledge stems from faith, more aptly that faith has to be realized by practice.⁵⁰ Torrance points to Clement's understanding of faith in Christ as both perfect and complete in itself, "for it is faith in Christ who is both

⁴⁶ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 25.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 94. Torrance confirms this notion saying, "What was here essential to the Hebraic and Christian teaching appeared inevitably fictitious and unreal to the Hellenic mind."

⁴⁸ Ibid., 150.

⁴⁹ Isaiah 7:9.

⁵⁰ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 130.

'foundation and superstructure'."⁵¹ Thus, Torrance concludes that knowledge both starts and is perfected through faith.⁵²

Furthermore, Torrance finds in Clement an understanding that "Greek philosophy is concerned mainly with words and terms and the conceptions they express, but Barbarian philosophy is concerned with things or objective subject-matter (πράγματα)."⁵³ Given that the term Barbarian (βάρβαρος) was used by the Greeks to note anything which is foreign to the Greek culture, this would have included Egyptian philosophy.⁵⁴ This notion of human knowledge empowered by perfect faith, which is rooted in Christ, constitutes an objective reality that stems from this Barbarian philosophy and ultimately yields a unique kind of knowledge. Clement calls this type of knowledge 'gnosis,' which seeks the knowledge of reality in itself.⁵⁵ Gnosis is radically different from epistemic knowledge, for the truth of the reality of God, which is revealed through gnosis and its dynamic appropriation, cannot be achieved by humanity on the basis of its own resources, but requires a life of faith. Epistemic knowledge seeks pure philosophy, which "taken by itself lacks depth, for it is concerned with partial truths or with copies of truth, and with nothing more than this world."⁵⁶ Additionally, Clement points out that there is a difference between the reality pursued by science and the one pursued by theology, concluding that the former is passive while the latter is active and dynamic.⁵⁷ Thus, this concept of gnosis or active 'knowledge of reality', as described by Torrance, is of non-Hellenic origin and bears strong links to ancient Egyptian categories of thought.

⁵¹ Ibid., 131.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 135.

⁵⁴ See Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon: Based on the German Work of Francis Passow* (New York: Harper, 1852), 261.

⁵⁵ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 132.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 138.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 135.

Seeking this concrete but active reality, which is ingrained in a life of faith, looks at God as supra-categorical and self-revealing and looks at epistemic knowledge as a means to reach this reality and not as an end of itself. Torrance argues, "this grounding of faith is what is objective and ultimate, in assent to primary realities, Clement speaks of as πρόληψις διανοίας, i.e. as a grasping of what is prior and independent of us but self-evident."⁵⁸ Torrance reads Clement to mean that "faith rests upon the demonstration that God himself provides in the immediacy of his own Word and Truth, and apart from that no other demonstration can add anything to the validity or certainty of faith."⁵⁹ Clement thinks of theological language in accordance with the realities it intends to refer. Therefore, Torrance states: "he distinguishes between words and things (ονόματα and πράγματα), signs and things signified (σημεία and τα σημαινόμενα), but also between words and signs (ονόματα and σύμβολα), and conceptions (νοήματα) and the subject-matter (τα υποκείμενα πράγματα, or simply τα υποκείμενα)."⁶⁰ Torrance further notes:

In interpreting the Scriptures we must constantly distinguish the words and the names from the things, and the signs from the things signified (τα σημαινόμενα), and seek to bring out the true meaning not by concentrating on terms and statements as such but through a scientific interrogation of the signs (σημεία) and indications (τεκμήρια) and witness (μαρτυρία) they enshrine until the mind apprehends *through* them the realities they indicate or point out to us ... Another way of putting this is to say that there is a difference between truths and truth itself and a difference between the things we declare about God which are 'myriads' and God himself in his own reality.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 140.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 164.

⁶¹ Ibid., 150.

Ultimately, Torrance insists that Christians must distinguish between the criteria for understanding the noetic realities from other criteria.⁶²

Torrance goes further to discuss the results of placing more weight on terms and concepts over the objective subject matter they represent. This led to theological confusion, which in turn led many early Christians at the time of Clement to "misinterpret the Scriptures," and perhaps precipitated the rise of major heresies that followed, such as Arianism.⁶³ This confusion could involve "a projection of anthropomorphic and geomorphic images upon God and sometimes it meant a dragging of the thought of God down on to the plane of earthly and creaturely things where he could not be distinguished from nature."⁶⁴ Torrance suggests that Clement avoids these errors by making use of the sharp distinction between the invisible realities of God as opposed to the visible realities of creation.⁶⁵ Moreover, he carries this one step too far, assuming, based on classical interpretations of Clement, that "undoubtedly it is at this very point that Clement's thought becomes highly problematical, for he took over the philosophical assumptions of a χωρισμός between the two worlds, the κόσμος νοητός and the κόσμος αίσθητός, a distinction which, as is known, had long become fashionable in Alexandria through Philo and Valentinian Gnosticism, but which went back to Platonic and Pythagorean thought."⁶⁶ He immediately recognizes however, "Clement claims that this distinction is also known to 'Barbarian philosophy', the κόσμος νοητός being the archetypal realm (τὸ μὲν ἀρχέτυπον), and the κόσμος αίσθητός being the image of what is called the model (τὸν δὲ εἰκόνα του καλουμένου παραδείγματος)."⁶⁷ While Torrance uses the classical parameters in evaluating Clement's thought and identifying his supposed problematical assumptions of the dualistic disjunction, he notes importantly that these claims by Clement are known

⁶² Ibid., 149.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 150. This is discussed in detail in Lee, *Living in Union with Christ*, chap. 2.

⁶⁶ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 152.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

to 'Barbarian philosophy'. In doing so, Torrance is able to point to another parameter that is not usually highlighted by classical evaluators of Clement, although he grapples with the exact language to identify it. Torrance accents Clement's awareness because the sort of χωρισμός that is found in Hellenic thought, which is a more dualistic mode of disjunctional thinking, is not the same understanding of χωρισμός in 'Barbarian philosophy' that was also held by Philo of Alexandria.

Demonstrating this further, Torrance attributes to Clement the idea that "to understand the written Scriptures, therefore, we need to understand the proper relation of what is written to the unwritten truth, and that is not itself something that can be handed on in written tradition."⁶⁸ He adds, "by unwritten tradition Clement is not referring to secret oral traditions of truth or teaching, but to a mode of enlightened insight (σαφήνεια) that develops along with a way of life and inheres in the souls of those who live 'gnostically'."⁶⁹ Torrance continues to note that to the modern mind, Clement seems to be working with non-rational connections,⁷⁰ which is exactly why the sort of χωρισμός understood by him is different than the Hellenic understanding. It is true that 'Barbarian philosophy' believes in χωρισμός, but it is understood in terms of an ontological chasm that exists between the creator and his creation. When Clement speaks of an archetypal realm and its image as a different realm, he does not leave it at the chasm but institutes the bridge between those two realms to be revelation and faith, which, we saw earlier in the theology of Origen, and which is further developed by Athanasius of Alexandria to mean the incarnation. Clement states that:

The Father, then, and Maker of all things is apprehended by all things, agreeably to all, by innate power and without teaching — things inanimate, sympathizing with the animate creation; and of living beings some are already immortal, working in the light of day ... But no race anywhere of tillers of the soil, or nomads, and not even of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 168.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 170.

dwellers in cities, can live, without being imbued with the faith of a superior being ... And each one of us is a partaker of His beneficence, as far as He wills. For the difference of the elect is made by the intervention of a choice worthy of the soul, and by exercise.⁷¹

The χωρισμός apparent in Clement's thought is not problematic as it is solved, or rather bridged, by his development of gnosis. As discussed above, gnosis is "the form of knowledge in which we pierce through to the truth of things by seeing them in their own essences and are able to grasp them accurately."⁷² However, gnosis also extends to the actualization of divine revelation and faith by executing a life of *praxis*, as Clement noted, 'by exercise', where the two realms are united. In other words, the κόσμος αίσθητός in Clement's thought is not merely a static or stagnant realm resembling a photocopy of the κόσμος νοητός. It is also not a separate realm that has no connection with the archetypal realm, but it is a dynamic reliving of the archetypal realm in the imaged realm animated by the twofold synergistic presence of the archetypal realm in the noetic powers of the image and the willful participation of the image in the archetypal mode of life. Jason Radcliff confirms this reading of Torrance, "Torrance contends that, according to Origen (as well as Clement, and Athanasius) only through a leaping forward of the awakened mind could truth be known, a leaping forward gained by corporate pious living."⁷³ Torrance here emphasizes a few Alexandrian parameters through his view of the unitary reality in which there is unity between heaven and earth, and through being in God's presence and relationship with him, there is another parameter seeking to live a pious life through piety and decorum.

In conclusion, Torrance presents us with a set of non-classical parameters in evaluating Clement's hermeneutical mind. First, he highlights Clement's association with 'Barbarian philosophy'; he then accents a particular feature where Clement introduces the notion of gnosis as the true type of knowledge. He shows us that

⁷¹ Clement, *Stromata* 5.14.

⁷² Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 175.

⁷³ Jason R. Radcliff and Thomas A. Noble, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Church Fathers: A Reformed, Evangelical, and Ecumenical Reconstruction of the Patristic Tradition* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 89.

within Clement's framework of gnosiology based on faith, "Clement distinguishes 'Hellenic truth' rather sharply from the truth which we encounter in the Scriptures, which not only has a divine origin but is God himself."⁷⁴ Once again, as with Philo, we find that Torrance is successful in discerning that Clement only uses a Greek philosophical method rather than content or argument, and therefore, for him, philosophy is only a co-operating agent for developing true theological knowledge.⁷⁵ While 'Barbarian' might seem like a pejorative term, it is actually used by Clement to denote Egyptian philosophy as well as Hebraic Philosophy.⁷⁶ Additionally, while Clement seems to spend some time using Greek philosophical categories, like λόγος, λόγος σπερματικός, the two κόσμοι, nonetheless, he is a Christian theologian, not a Greek philosopher and is simply borrowing whatever philosophical tools that are available to him to declare the Christian truth.

iii. Origen of Alexandria

Torrance's reading of Origen's theology proves slightly problematic,⁷⁷ however, as shown below, at times, Torrance understands Origen's true and pious intentions, albeit, other times, rather than continuing to rely on this reading, he veers away from this understanding relying on interpretations of Origen as a Platonist by contemporaneous patristic scholars such as Georges Florovsky and

⁷⁴ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 135.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ In many instances, Clement particularly referred to the Egyptian philosophy as 'Barbarian philosophy' and has identified himself to hold this philosophy. In other instances, Clement refers to the Hebrew philosophy, particularly that of Moses as 'Barbarian philosophy'. In both cases, 'Barbarian philosophy' as utilized by Clement aims to denote a different way of thinking as opposed to the Hellenic mode of thinking. As mentioned above, Clement counts himself a follower of 'Barbarian philosophy' as evident when he wrote, "accordingly, the Barbarian philosophy, which we follow, is in reality perfect and true." See *Stromata* 2.2. Furthermore, "Since, then, the forms of truth are two — the names and the things — some discourse of names, occupying themselves with the beauties of words: such are the philosophers among the Greeks. But we who are Barbarians have the things." See *Stromata* 6.17.

⁷⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 4.

George Dragas.⁷⁸ Despite Torrance's adoption of this flawed understanding, he appears to have been of two minds regarding Origen and whether he should be positively regarded, or instead be considered a Platonic dualist. This is particularly evident in somewhat contradictory statements found in his work *The Trinitarian Faith*. Torrance first provides that "Origen was a very learned biblical scholar unsurpassed in the early church, but he was a theologian with an essentially speculative, though devout, mind, who felt compelled to carry his thinking beyond the literal content of biblical statements to the divine realities they signified."⁷⁹

Just one sentence later, he mentions that Origen "held with Irenaeus that the controlling center of reference in our knowledge of God is ultimately the truth itself as revealed in Jesus Christ, not in any human formulations of our knowledge of the truth."⁸⁰ As an initial matter, in linking Origen and Irenaeus, Torrance indicates his positive reflection on Origen's understandings and interpretations. While he appears to cast Origen in a negative light by calling him speculative, as speculation when used in the context of biblical interpretation is dangerous as it presupposes a sort of conjecture rather than the use of revelation, Torrance finds that Origen looked beyond the literal words of the Scripture to the divine realities they signified. Torrance generally supported this divine revelation as a key characteristic in his Christocentric understanding of the divine-human interaction. Thus, it is unclear why it is that when Origen utilizes this same type of revelation, it becomes speculation. Ultimately, Torrance accedes to the common opinion of his time and classifies Origen, and in fact even Philo, as Platonic and dualist: "Unlike Irenaeus, he worked with a dualist framework of thought, the Platonic or Philonic distinction between the sensible world and the intelligible world. The implications of that dualist way of thinking were very far reaching: 'the invisible and incorporeal things in heaven are true, but the visible and corporeal things on earth are copies

⁷⁸ See George Dragas' account of Torrance's understanding of Alexandrian theology and how he persuaded him to let go of his, in my evaluation, correct intuitions and understanding for the sake of the ecumenical dialogue with the Ecumenical Patriarch. See Matthew Baker, "The Correspondence between T. F. Torrance and Georges Florovsky (1950-1973)," *Participatio* 4, "T. F. Torrance and Eastern Orthodoxy" (2013): 46.

⁷⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Faith*, New Edition (Edinburgh: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2000), 35.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

of true things, not true themselves".⁸¹ This is a misreading of Origen, who instead was using dualistic language in order to explain unitary realities.

As described above, there is a remarkable sense of hesitation in Torrance's language in creating a sharp distinction in Origen's thought between the sensible and the intelligible worlds, perhaps suggesting he may have felt a certain pressure to express this opinion. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that Torrance's understanding of Alexandrian theology shifted from his original intuitions and understandings as a result of influence by others.⁸² Predominantly, Origen's expression that the visible and corporeal things on earth are copies of true things⁸³ is a factual statement built upon his ancient Egyptian understanding of the proto-eschatological axis of reality and the fallen contour and his attempts to communicate these ideas to others who understood things dualistically, and does not necessarily constitute any type of dualism. Moreover, Torrance states:

that outlook deeply affected Origen's understanding of the Holy Scriptures as providentially provided media within the sensible world through which the divine *Logos* accommodated his communication to human weakness, wrapping up the mysteries of divine revelation in forms and figures that can be grasped, but only in order that through them he might lift up believing minds to a higher level where they may understand spiritual or divine realities in the intelligible world beyond.⁸⁴

The chasm between the sensible and the intelligible worlds is not just left as an unfillable gap, but there is the media that connects both realms, in this case, as

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² As noted previously, Fr. George Dragas seems to have persuaded Torrance of a specific way to read Alexandrian authors. I believe that as a result of Torrance's desire to further ecumenical dialogue with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, he conceded his position on the Alexandrian fathers when it became apparent that they were fixated on their understanding of Alexandrian theology through a Hellenic lens.

⁸³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, ed., *Origen: Spirit and Fire: A Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, trans. Robert J. Daly (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 32.

⁸⁴ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 36.

with Clement, Origen claims it is Holy Scriptures. This connection is later fully developed by Athanasius to be the incarnation of the divine *Logos*, not just his words, as was also clear in Origen.⁸⁵

If we are to depend on Torrance's classification of the cosmological and partial-ethnic models delineated above that circumscribe philosophical schools of thought to evaluate Torrance's own reading of Clement and Origen, the most likely conclusion is that they are unitary. Subsequently, it is extremely hard to describe Clement or Origen as dualists since the apparent disjunction in their models of the sensible and intelligible worlds is always in communication through the divine *Logos*, the Incarnation and union. Torrance confirms this bridge in Origen's thought between the two realms by showing, "Origen held that through divine inspiration the human terms found in Holy Scripture are governed by the nature (φύσει) of the realities they signify, and are not just conventionally (θέσει) related to them."⁸⁶ Ultimately in the mind of the believer, there is a synergy between the divine inspiration and the human mind where the relationship is governed by the divine reality itself. However, this synergy requires human *kenosis* where the mind is ready to receive the divine, "but that requires considerable spiritual training of the mind in theological insight (θεωρία), a kind of divine sense (αἰσθησις θεία), appropriate to knowledge of God."⁸⁷ This notion of *kenotic* humility, which allows the mind to interact with divine inspiration and divests itself from egotistical weights that impede its ascension to the divine truth that is otherwise not seen through the clutter of worldly noise, is exactly what distinguishes Origen's philosophy. It is not an epistemic philosophy; it is a gnosiological philosophy characteristic of the mystical philosophies known to the indigenous Egyptian religious experience as established earlier and further discussed in the next section. Torrance recognizes this in Origen saying, "this combination of careful investigation and spiritual training was very characteristic of Origen."⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Books 1-10, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 149.

⁸⁶ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 36.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

The key to this mystical or gnosiological philosophy is active participation with the divine initiative. This notion is ultimately beyond the capacity of the Hellenic frame of reference, as noted by Torrance who clarifies that it was undoubtedly dangerous for "this speculative outreach of the spiritual mind, beyond the realm of knowledge [to be] subject to the kind of criteria of truth with which Greek philosophy and science operated."⁸⁹ Torrance supports Origen's use of mystical philosophy, "Origen was fascinated with it, particularly since it was associated with the Old Testament men of God like Melchizedek the pioneer of heavenly worship, or Moses who spoke with God face to face, or with the experience of the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration and with what St Paul wrote of his own exalted experiences, all of which pointed to the kind of sublime vision of God that may be opened up to 'the mystic and inexpressible insight'."⁹⁰ His statement recognizes two facts that should not escape our attention. First, is that this sort of mystical philosophy is well known to the Jewish experience as well documented scripturally by Torrance.⁹¹ Second, the mystical experience and philosophy that these men of Scripture had is, for some reason, not regarded as speculative or dangerous by the Christian West, on the contrary the foundation of faith in an unseen transcendent God. In fact, this sort of experience, and these men of God are often praised for their ability and readiness to receive this kind of mystical experience.⁹² Torrance again highlights this feature and once more justifies Origen saying:

There was another side to Origen's approach, however, which provided this 'theologizing' (θεολογείν) with safeguards against a fanciful

⁸⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ See Ibid. Torrance suggests Melchizedek and Moses experienced God in mystical ways. Mystical philosophy is well known in Jewish sources, see Maren R. Niehoff, "What is in a Name? Philo's Mystical Philosophy of Language," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2.3 (1995): 220–252.

⁹² It is worth noting here that this sort of mystical philosophy as a conduit for a religious Christocentric experience is practiced daily and has been in practice continuously in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian Christian churches. This tradition is far from a speculative experience but is indeed in the very fabric of the liturgical experiences of those communities.

'mythologizing' (μυθολογεῖν), and with a normative frame of faith and devotion which could help to keep knowledge of God in the center of the life and living tradition of 'the Great Church'. This had to do with the way in which he brought careful inquiry and training in godliness to bear upon each other...Origen concentrated on developing a way of knowing God which was strictly in accordance with the nature of God as he has revealed himself to us, that is, in a *godly* way; and he set himself to cultivate personal godliness in reliance upon the grace of Christ and the power of his Spirit, so that he could bring to knowledge of God an appropriately godly habit of mind.⁹³

Torrance echoes Origen's conclusion about his own practice saying, "generally speaking, then, 'the aim is to get as near the truth as possible and to shape our belief [and life] according to the rule of godliness'."⁹⁴ Through his evaluation of the previous aspects of Clement, Origen, and Athanasius' theology, Torrance continues to unknowingly allude to ancient Egyptian paradigms of thought.

5. Alexandrian Features in Torrance's Theology

Torrance has been instrumental, indeed a pioneer, in examining the age-old Christological dilemma of nature(s) through his Christocentric synthesis of patristic theology and his understanding of the particularity of Alexandrian thought. This is largely due to the fact that Torrance, following the footsteps of the Alexandrian fathers, communicated Christian faith and theology through his understanding of the fathers' apostolic tradition in light of philosophy and science. In doing so, as described below, he was able to glean a few feature characteristics of Alexandrian thought; however, because he was not exposed to Egyptology it was difficult for him to identify proper language to describe them. The categories of thought in Alexandria were different from those in the Hellenic-Latinized West. Nonetheless, in trying to present these categories in a manner that the Hellenic-Latinized mind could comprehend, Alexandrian authors often articulated divine truth through contemporaneous scientific and philosophical definitions to make it relatable to a

⁹³ Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 37–38.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

dualistic mode of thinking, while maintaining and seeking to reveal the inherently Egyptian understanding of the unitary core of reality. In doing so, the Alexandrian fathers, as well as Torrance, never reduced the totality of the divine truth to mere scientific or philosophical equations. Origen teaches us, “our teacher and Lord masters so many sciences that he cannot only preach for ten years like the grammarian who then does not have anything to say, or like a philosopher who proclaims his traditions and has nothing new to teach. The sciences of Christ however are so many that he will preach for all eternity.”⁹⁵ This reality of God must be encountered in an ontologically relational manner and not superficially. In trying to apprehend the mystery of God, the fathers employ scientific terms such as *οὐσία* and *φύσις*, yet all the while they maintain that the totality of God can never be understood in these terms but can only be apprehended mystically through apophatic language.⁹⁶ As explained below, Torrance unwittingly recognized features that correspond with the Egyptian categories of thought that Egyptology has brought to light and which helps exegete the Alexandrian tradition. However, before engaging with these categories, it is noteworthy to highlight that Torrance is one of the few theologians in modern academia who has recognized a particularity in Alexandrian thought, which led him specifically to refer to Clement, Origen, Didymus, Athanasius, Cyril, and John Philoponos as Alexandrian theologians and not simply the Greek fathers.

The work of Torrance is of special significance for a contemporary theological restatement of Alexandrian Christological doctrine. Torrance’s work is distinguished by a perception — incomplete and inchoate but genuine and productive — of the distinctiveness of the Alexandrian tradition in relation to characteristically Greek

⁹⁵ Origen, *Homilies On Psalms* 74.6 in L. Perrone, with M., Molin Pradel; E., Prinzivalli; A., Cacciari, *Origenes Werke, vol. 13, Die neuen Psalmenhomilien. Eine kritische Edition des Codex Monacensis Graecus 314 [Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte. Neue Folge* 19 (Berlin/Munich/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 73–523.

⁹⁶ Therefore, it is pivotal that theologians strive to update the philosophical and scientific language used to articulate divine truths while admitting the inherent inadequacy. This is a foundational element in the definition of dogma as dynamic and not static.

and Latin forms of thought.⁹⁷ This is revealed in his portrayal of some of those features — the imminent advent of God, the unity of heaven and earth, and piety and decorum — that render the Alexandrian tradition unique. Torrance did, however, also face limitations to his recovery of this distinctive Alexandrian voice: namely that he operated within (and struggled against) the terms of classical scholarship in which he was trained, continually grappling with ways to precisely characterize the distinguishing features of the Alexandrian Patristic texts that he studied with such care.⁹⁸

It is to Torrance's great credit that he was able in part to overcome these limitations of the Western historiographical and philosophical framework that he inherited, ultimately discovering through his own study of the Alexandrian fathers perhaps the most essential tenant of the Ancient Egyptian philosophical framework, namely, the fundamentally *theocentric* (God-centered perspective, or, more closely, Christocentric) character of Alexandrian thought. This Christocentric principle transcends human epistemological categories: on this view, objective and concrete reality is fully expressed in the person of Jesus Christ, and therefore is not susceptible to categorization because the express image of God cannot be encapsulated within the limitations of human categories.

i. Imminent Advent of God and the Proto-Eschatological Axis of Reality

Torrance recognized the imminent advent of God as a category of ancient Egyptian thought. He explains, "Everything in Christianity centers on the incarnation of the Son of God, an invasion of God among men and women in time, bringing and working out a salvation not only understandable by them in their own historical and human life and existence, but historically and concretely accessible to them on earth and in time, in the midst of their frailty, contingency, relativity and

⁹⁷ Dick O. Eugenio, *Communion with the Triune God: The Trinitarian Soteriology of T.F. Torrance* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2014), 5. See also Jason Robert Radcliff, *Thomas F. Torrance and the Church Fathers: A Reformed, Evangelical, and Ecumenical Reconstruction of the Patristic Tradition* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015), 128.

⁹⁸ See the earlier discussion in this essay of the influence of Torrance's contemporaries on his reading of the Alexandrian tradition.

sin.”⁹⁹ This has profound implications on Torrance’s understanding of the proto-eschatological axis of reality, and his understanding of Origen’s fallen contour. Origen understands the distortion of our union in the divine eternal dimension of reality which takes a different alternative, a fallen contour that curves away from the original eternal dimension and then runs parallel to it, and ultimately connecting back with the eternal dimension at the end of time. Any event found on the fallen contour line is, in Origen’s view, a temporal, transient event that has a parallel corresponding reality on the eternal dimension. Building upon the theology of Cyril of Alexandria, Torrance describes the same concept in his own words saying:

The unity of eternity and time in the incarnation means that true time in all its finite reality is not swallowed up by eternity but eternally affirmed as reality even for God. The unity of God’s action and historical event in Jesus Christ means that far from being destroyed or depreciated, history is conserved and preserved by this mystery. Only in such a union of true God and true man can the historical element be maintained unreservedly because it is brought into essential relation with God.¹⁰⁰

Through a more robust understanding of science, Torrance is able to relate the same truth in more precise and clear terms. This confirms Torrance’s ability to articulate his intuition regarding Alexandrian particularity as well as his unintentional ability to capture the texture of some of the ancient Egyptian categories of thought and their implications on Alexandrian authors as outlined in this research.

ii. Unity Between Heaven and Earth

The unity between heaven and earth is a recurring theme in Torrance’s theology. This largely stems from the previous category of the imminent advent of God, which is rooted in the central role the incarnation plays in the formation of his theology. Additionally, due to his grasp of the Alexandrian way of thinking, he is able to articulate his thoughts in a unitary way, as mentioned earlier. Torrance

⁹⁹ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

demonstrates this category and ability in stating that “in the ultimate act of union between God and Israel, and in the ultimate conflict which that entailed, in Israel’s refusal of the Messiah, the rejection of Israel had to take place. God gave himself to Israel and assumed Israel into covenant partnership with himself – and that covenant provided in the midst of humanity a revelation of God’s will to be man’s God in spite of human sin.”¹⁰¹ He later clarifies:

If you want to get the clearest grasp of what this means, study the *Contra Gentes* of St. Athanasius and see how again and again he employs musical terms to describe the kind of symphonic texture that the order of the universe under one God the creator has. It is the masterful idea of a unified rationality that sweeps away the Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and certainly Ptolemaic duality between celestial and terrestrial worlds, celestial and terrestrial mechanics, and all the dualism and pluralism that go with it.¹⁰²

He contends that these dualities were replaced by a relational concept that had far-reaching implications even in the sciences, as evident in the physics of John Philoponos.¹⁰³ He further argues, “We must speak of a personal presence of God in all created being, and in a certain sense therefore of a unity of all created being with God, but as such created being has an existence different from and parallel to God’s existence, though absolutely dependent upon him and derived from him.”¹⁰⁴ This last statement is a profoundly Alexandrian understanding of reality. It should be noted in the theology of Origen and Cyril that while there is union between the creator and the creatures, there is a quick recognition of the ontological gap between both to guard against confusion, alteration, and the conflation of essence. Furthermore, this understanding is also reflected in Torrance’s use of the Einsteinian

¹⁰¹ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 49.

¹⁰² Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 52–53.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰⁴ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 66.

model in which there is a space-time continuum and a unitary outlook on the heavenly and the earthly.¹⁰⁵

iii. Piety and Decorum

Torrance saw an intrinsic relationship between piety and the incarnation. In his view, piety is a relational attitude towards God following the example of Jesus in his relationship with the Father. Torrance understood piety to be a process of obedient living based on love with the God with whom we relate. Accordingly, Torrance alludes to the ancient Egyptian understanding of piety and decorum asserting, "Thus instead of the piety and spirituality of the earliest church controlling the presentation of Christ, and even forming and creating much of it, that church in all its piety and spirituality was by its very nature controlled by the obedience of Jesus Christ to the Father."¹⁰⁶ While he recognizes the necessity for piety, he does not attribute it to a religious experience, but rather to the obedience of the Son to the Father. He simply grounds piety and decorum in *kerygma*. He clarifies saying:

Christ is never presented in the New Testament simply in the context of the piety and spirituality of the primitive church, and never as interpreted by that piety and spirituality or by psychological or existential experience. Certainly the Christ presented in and through the *kērygma* is a Christ who challenges men and women and requires of them decision, but never in such a way that the centre of gravity passes over from Christ to that decision, and so that it is the decisive answer to Christ that in fact controls the whole complex of presentation and response.¹⁰⁷

Kerygma is therefore nothing other than the declaration of the concrete reality of God and the impossibility of our existence outside of the conformity to this reality.

¹⁰⁵ Torrance wrote many works that engage with Einsteinian physics, including *Space, Time and Resurrection*, and *Space, Time and Incarnation*. He also used the Einsteinian model in his theological assessment in *The Mediation of Christ*, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, and *Divine Meaning*, in addition to other works.

¹⁰⁶ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 28.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 267.

Hence, piety is not a function of religiosity, but a return to the image and the likeness. Part of the image and likeness is being in communion with persons just like the Trinity is a communion of persons. Therefore, piety is about the restoration of relationship with the divine. This understanding of piety was also evident in ancient Egyptian thought and practice which sought piety not as a ritual but as a desire to relate to the divine.

iv. The Alexandrian Miaphysite Unitary Reality or φύσις

In evaluating the meaning of φύσις in the Alexandrian patristic tradition, it is important to note that any word has an etymological meaning and a contextual or pragmatic meaning. Ultimately, to understand the Alexandrian writers for who they are, we must evaluate the notion of φύσις contextually. The definition of the word φύσις has been an academic battleground for decades. Nonetheless, there is now more evidence than ever of the various contexts in which the word was used and consequently its various meanings. Generally speaking, the word φύσις has more than twelve meanings in Liddle Scott and Lampe patristic dictionaries. However, Walter Veazie argues that just based on Plato and Aristotle there are generally four sources for the determination of the meaning of the word in philosophy, including analysis of Plato and Aristotle's discussion of φύσις philosophically; the way they used φύσις in other contexts; its use in their writings outside of philosophy; and finally, the way φύσις was used in other Greek literature.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, Greek language scholars find a remarkable difference between the understanding of φύσις in Plato when compared with Aristotle.¹⁰⁹ Alfred Benn argues that the Platonic φύσις offers "the sense of supreme and absolute reality."¹¹⁰ This is quite different to the Aristotelian use of the same word to denote a 'nature.'

¹⁰⁸ Walter B. Veazie, "I. The Word ΦΥΣΙΣ.," *Archiv Für Geschichte Der Philosophie* 33.1-2 (2009): 4.

¹⁰⁹ Alfred Benn, "The Idea of Nature in Plato.," *Archiv Für Geschichte Der Philosophie* 9.1 (2009): 24.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Furthermore, according to Pierre Hadot, "the Greek word *physis* ... originally meant the beginning."¹¹¹

Through Torrance's epistemological classifications, he was able to gauge the definition of φύσις in the context of Alexandria over against various Platonist and Aristotelian philosophers of the time. He eloquently states, "there was no solution to the problem created by their dualistic thinking of Christ ... and so it became clear to great patristic theologians that a very different unitary approach to the doctrine of Christ was needed, one in which they understood him right from the start in his wholeness and integrity as one Person who is both God and man."¹¹² This unitary approach is evident in both Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria's understanding of the meaning of φύσις, which is fundamentally different from Antiochene's understanding of φύσις as the Latin *natura*. Torrance details this difference, noting that originally, *natura* in the Latin understanding referred to the state of being born, and this is the common use of the word nature.¹¹³ However, φύσις is best described through the phrase *κατά φύσιν*, which means according to reality, so to know something *κατά φύσιν* is to know it according to its truth.¹¹⁴ He asserts, "*Physis* is rather *being itself*, that by virtue of which existents or essence become and remain knowable, that which manifests itself in unfolding, and perseveres and endures in that manifestation of itself."¹¹⁵ He further notes that φύσις as a reality does not only encompass earthly realities but also heavenly ones. Torrance argues:

In this sense *physis* can apply not only to earthly realities but also to heavenly realities, the world of God as well as the world of human beings and things. That is to say, originally, *physis* was not narrowed down in its reference (as it was in Latin when it was translated *natura* or 'nature') to the realm of natural phenomena, for it referred to the

¹¹¹ Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 10.

¹¹² Thomas Forsyth Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 53.

¹¹³ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 202.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

nature of things in their own being and as they emerge before us out of their hiddenness.¹¹⁶

He further relates φύσις to the notion of truth saying, "in that sense *physis* and *alētheia* are more or less equivalents, for truth is the truth of being coming out of its hiddenness into manifestation, the revealing of *physis*. Truth means that the *physis* of something stands out before us and manifests itself before us in accordance with what it is in its own being, reality, or *physis*."¹¹⁷ This is how, in Torrance's view, the Alexandrian fathers understood and used the word φύσις and "could apply *physis* equally to God and to man, to Christ in his being as God, insofar as he is *homoousios* with the Father, and to Christ in his being as man, insofar as he is *homoousios* with man."¹¹⁸ Torrance further explains, "understood in this way, it is possible to see why some of the fathers could use the term *physis* as equivalent sometimes to being, *ousia*, and sometimes to *hypostasis*."¹¹⁹ Torrance presents this as evidence for the correct reading of the *miaphysite* tradition based on the aforementioned understanding of φύσις in the Alexandrian tradition. He asserts:

Moreover, understood in this way, it is possible to see why some of the fathers could use the term *physis* as equivalent sometimes to being, *ousia*, and sometimes to *hypostasis*. Thus when some fathers spoke of Christ in terms of one nature, *mia physis*, they meant that in Christ we have the manifestation of one reality (*ousia*) not two realities; and when they spoke of *physis* as equivalent to *hypostasis* they meant that he was in himself the reality which became manifest toward us, *physis* and *hypostasis* here being used to refer to the concrete objectivity of the one reality of Christ. In view of this, we can now see that some fathers who spoke of Christ as one *physis* were not necessarily monophysite (denying divine and human 'natures' in Christ, and letting

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 202–3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 203.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

the human 'nature' be swallowed up in the divine), but were consistent with Chalcedonian thought. Thus many traditional 'monophysites' to this day hold a 'Chalcedonian' Christology – much of the difference that has been traditionally exploited here in debate is due to terminological differences rather than difference in actual meaning or intention.¹²⁰

As Torrance aptly recognized, Cyril understood φύσις as one reality. Hans Van Loon notes that "Cyril emphasizes that the incarnate Word is not two persons, not two SEPARATE REALITIES, but that he is one REALITY, that is, one ὑπόστασις or one φύσις."¹²¹ In other words, Cyril understood μία φύσις to mean the reality of the union of the divine with the human in the one person of Christ. Therefore, as Van Loon clarifies, "In Cyril's own Christological language, then, the words φύσις, ὑπόστασις, and πρόσωπον are always synonymous, and they designate an individual being, subsisting separately from other beings. Therefore, Cyril could never accept *dyophysite* language, since 'two natures' for him implied two separate persons."¹²² John McGuckin affirms this notion, saying, "Cyril primarily uses hypostasis to connote individual reality."¹²³ Torrance adds that for Cyril, "*nature* meant 'reality,'" so that for him to think of Christ as 'one nature' meant that he was 'one reality,' and not a schizoid being."¹²⁴ Ultimately, Cyril's use of φύσις is based on his indigenous outlook of the proto-eschatological axis of unitary reality.

This understanding was not unique to Cyril, as Athanasius before him also understood φύσις in the same way. Torrance points out, "Athanasius used *physis* more or less as the equivalent or as the synonym of reality (ἀλήθεια, or οὐσία), as we see in the very frequent use of the expression 'in accordance with nature' (κατὰ φύσιν) where to think in accordance with the nature of things is to think truly

¹²⁰ Ibid., 204.

¹²¹ Hans Van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 232.

¹²² Ibid., 16.

¹²³ John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy, Its History, Theology, and Texts* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 212.

¹²⁴ Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 61.

(ἀληθῶς) of them.”¹²⁵ As summarized by Torrance, “to know and understand something involves a way of thinking strictly in accordance with what it actually is, that is, in accordance with its nature (κατὰ φύσιν) as it becomes disclosed in the course of inquiry, and thus in accordance with what it really is, or in accordance with its reality (κατ' ἀλήθειαν), and allow its nature (φύσις) or reality (ἀλήθεια) to determine for us how we are to think and speak appropriately of it.”¹²⁶ Torrance’s recognition of these definitions inadvertently captured the specific unitary and realist texture of the indigenous Egyptian outlook and accordingly point to an uninterrupted continuity of thought within the Alexandrian tradition.

In the integration of the divine and the human, there is no gap between the realm of truth and the realm of event.¹²⁷ Divine acts and human acts “are *both acts of one and the same person*,”¹²⁸ therefore it would be difficult if not impossible to speak of the two natures after the union, because in reality they have indeed already been united in a person. Even centuries before Athanasius and Cyril defined or understood *physis* in this way, Clement of Alexandria defined it as “φύσις ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀλήθεια.”¹²⁹ It is therefore evident that Alexandria always understood *physis* to mean ‘true reality’.¹³⁰

Torrance synthesizes the distinctions in the use of terminology and its contribution to the Christological differences between ‘monophysites’ and ‘Chalcedonians’ saying:

There is, however, still another way of using *physis* found among the fathers, mostly of the Greek Antiochene sort. This derives from a more

¹²⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 211.

¹²⁶ Torrance, *Theological and Natural Science*, 100.

¹²⁷ Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, 107.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹²⁹ *Sancti Maximi Confessoris Opuscula Theologica Et Polemica* (J. P. Migne, 1865), vol. 91, 264C.

¹³⁰ It is noteworthy to mention that the Lampe Patristic Greek Lexicon also defines ‘*physis*’ as ‘reality’. See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 1498.

Aristotelian, biological or vitalist approach, in which the stress is on the relation of *physis* (=nature) to *phuo* (to produce or grow). It is this naturalistic sense of the word *physis*, corresponding to the Aristotelian 'second substance', that is properly translated by the Latin *natura*. Serious difficulties and misunderstandings arose among the fathers when this vitalistic or naturalistic sense of *physis* was employed of the divine and the human *physeis* in the one Person of Christ, as though it were the equivalent of the word *physis* in its other meaning as reality. Problems such as these are found in the differences between the so-called Eastern 'monophysites' and the 'Chalcedonians' who, as far as I can see, basically intend the same thing! Indeed more actual monophysitism may be found in the West than in those who today are usually called 'monophysite'.¹³¹

Torrance is clearly able to draw a distinction between the Chalcedonian tradition which thinks in Aristotelian terms, and the *miaphysite* (referred to as 'monophysite') tradition which thinks differently. Despite his inability to pinpoint or label the exact way in which the *miaphysite* tradition is different, he correctly identified that it was not Hellenic.

v. John Philoponos Extended the Theology of Athanasius and Cyril

Torrance also recognized the importance of the theology of John Philoponos and the presence and continuity of these indigenous features throughout his thought. Philoponos, an Alexandrian who followed shortly after Athanasius and Cyril, further built upon and developed this unitary model. Philoponos' understanding of Christology as a unitary reality was centuries ahead of his peers because of his ability to synthesize theology, philosophy, and science. Through his Einsteinian lens, Torrance validated Philoponos' reading of the Alexandrian fathers and found he was not a heretical monophysite. Torrance's explains his perspective on Philoponos: "For John Philoponos, however, who did not think in an Aristotelian way, in line with the theological and scientific tradition to which he belonged, nature meant 'reality', so that for him to think of Christ's 'one nature' meant that he was

¹³¹ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 212.

'one reality,' and not a schizoid being. John Philoponos was no monophysite in the heretical sense, but the accusation of heresy had the effect of denigrating also his anti-dualist thought in science and philosophy."¹³² Torrance underlines the subtle aspects that differentiates monist and unitary modes of thinking by emphasizing the one reality of Christ's being in Philoponos' thought.

Philoponos, in his Christological exposition in the *Arbiter*, ascertains that "the union of divinity and humanity is not a mere name, but a reality (οὐκ ἄρα ψιλὸν ὄνομα τοῦτο ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ πρᾶγμα PG 140,56A) which is united by substance, not by any accompanying accidents ... If what results from the union is a substance viz. nature (both terms are used synonymously), it is right to assert one nature of Christ after the union, albeit not simple but composite."¹³³ He adds, "the divine nature of the Logos and the human [nature] having been united, a single Christ has resulted from the two; not merely a simple union of natures has resulted, as it may be said that God has been united with a man, or a man with a man, while their natures are divided and no single entity has been constituted by each of them, such as, for example, a single man or a single living being...a relation of such kind, in the case of our Lord Christ, belongs to the whole human entelechy."¹³⁴

Philoponos is keen on explaining that the unity of the divine and human in the one person of Christ is not just an eventuality but an ontological truth. He continues to argue in his exposition that the unity of the divine and the human results in a single entity which is "not a mere name, but a reality."¹³⁵ He also provides that if "Christ is truly one in name and in reality [then] one cannot speak in any way at all of 'two Christs' in regard to the Lord's incarnation."¹³⁶ Philoponos concludes his rebuttal saying:

If, therefore, we profess in common an indivisible union, and the

¹³² Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 61.

¹³³ Uwe M. Lang, *John Philoponos and the Controversies over Chalcedon in the Sixth Century A Study and Translation of the Arbiter* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2002), 48.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

indivisible cannot be divided, for whatever reason this is not possible, then the union, i.e. the end-product of the union cannot be divided. If this is so, and duality...is nothing else than a parting and a first division of the monad, then the end-product of the union cannot receive the reality or the name of duality. The end-product of the union, however, is Christ. For this reason, if the union is preserved, we cannot call Christ 'two natures', unless someone understands by the word ['union'] a difference between the united [elements].¹³⁷

Torrance endorses the Christological understanding of Philoponos finding him in line with both Athanasius and Cyril saying:

In that context the Athanasian and Cyrilian expression *μία φύσις σεσαρκωμένη*, used by Philoponos, referred to 'one incarnate reality', indeed one undivided Being or Person (one *ousia* or *hypostasis*, and in that sense also as one *physis*) without any rejection of the truth that Jesus Christ is God and Man in one Person, one incarnate reality both perfectly divine and perfectly human. The *mia physis* was just as important for Philoponos, as it had been for Athanasius and Cyril for whom it affirmed the oneness of the incarnate Word of God (*μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη*). That is to say, like Athanasius and Cyril, John Philoponos would have nothing to do with a schizoid understanding of Christ for in him God and Man were one Reality and Person, but that does not mean that Philoponos was a 'monophysite' in the heretical sense, any more than was Athanasius or Cyril.¹³⁸

Philoponos' balanced understanding of Alexandrian Christology played an important role in lifting the anathemas against him by the Greek Orthodox Church, largely due

¹³⁷ Ibid., 200.

¹³⁸ Torrance, *Theological and Natural Science*, 111.

to the efforts of Torrance and George Dragas.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, many scholars still reject his theology. Torrance explains:

The old dualisms operated below the surface, corroding the new ideas (not least these of John Philoponos), and then broke out into the open and were given paradigmatic status in the west through the subtle but admittedly beautiful blending of Christian theology with Neoplatonic philosophy and Ptolemaic cosmology by the great St. Augustine. Already, however, a somewhat dualist understanding of Christology, which took its cue from Leo's famous Tome to the Council of Chalcedon, provided the platform from which the views of John Philoponos were rejected as "monophysite" and heretical. A monophysite is someone who denies that there are two "natures" — a divine and a human nature — in Christ, where nature is interpreted the Aristotelian way.¹⁴⁰

Thus, although the anathemas were lifted against Philoponos and he is not considered a monophysite, the dualistic language used at the Council of Chalcedon

¹³⁹ See Thomas F. Torrance "John Philoponos of Alexandria-Theologian and Physicist," *KANON XV, Yearbook of the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches* (Roman Kovar, Eichenau, 1999), 315–330. It is rather interesting how the lifting of the anathemas against John Philoponos by the Greek Orthodox Church did not also lead to the lifting of the anathemas against the Coptic Church since the anathemas against Philoponos were about his Christological views, which he shares with the Coptic Church. Furthermore, while undertaking in-depth research on this topic and the events leading to lifting the anathema from John Philoponos by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, it came to my attention that the Patriarchate and other persons involved in this event who were personally with Torrance at the time are recanting their positions in regards to the validity of this event and denying that it ever happened. Nonetheless, it was mentioned by Torrance, to my knowledge, at least three times, once in the publication mentioned above and twice in his audio lectures. Torrance further details the involvement of the Archbishop of Axum in this event. This recantation of events is consistent with another incident involving the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria in which Torrance had the unusual and unprecedented honor of being named "honorary proto-presbyter" of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria. Later this honor was also denied although his son Professor Iain Torrance still holds, to this day, the pictorial cross which was gifted to his father Thomas F. Torrance during this ordination event. For more details on this honor of "honorary proto-presbyter," see Matthew Baker and Todd Speidell, *T. F. Torrance and Eastern Orthodoxy: Theology in Reconciliation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), vii.

¹⁴⁰ Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 61.

and the specific problems found in the Tome of Leo still presents a hurdle to popular acceptance of the Alexandrian unitary reality as a basis for a *miaphysite* understanding of Christology.

6. Modern Coptic Theologians in Conversation with Torrance's Understanding of Reality

From its inception, the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria has been an educator of theological realism. Clement of Alexandria "spoke of faith as a 'willing assent' of the mind to reality, an act in which the truth of things seizes hold of us and brings us to assent to it in accordance with its own self-evidence."¹⁴¹ Centuries later, Athanasius and Cyril taught the same doctrine, as discussed earlier. To illustrate how this manner of thinking has been carried through to modern times, we must examine the writings of contemporary Coptic theologians, including Bishop Gregorios¹⁴² and Fr. Matthew the Poor.¹⁴³

As an initial matter, Bishop Gregorios has been an instrumental figure in various ecumenical discussions. This is in large part due to the fact that he bases his expositions of Christology on the notion that theologians often need to update their philosophical language to express theological concepts. He writes, "If philosophical expressions are not fit to express all that philosophers mean to say,

¹⁴¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelations of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 197.

¹⁴² Bishop Gregorios (1919–2001), by birth Waheeb Atalla Girgis, was the Coptic Orthodox Bishop of Theological Studies, Coptic Culture and Scientific Research. He obtained his PhD in Coptic Studies from the University of Manchester and later became a monk at Al-Muharraq Monastery. He was ordained Bishop by the late Pope Kyrillos VI. He played an important role alongside Fr. George Florovsky and Fr. John Romanides in the ecumenical dialogues between the Oriental Orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox churches.

¹⁴³ Fr. Matthew the Poor, or Mattá al-Miskīn (1919–2006), by birth Youssef Iskander, was a Coptic Orthodox monk at the Monastery of St. Macarius in the Egyptian Scetis. He was nominated twice for the Coptic Papal office and was an instrumental figure in the revival of theological scholarship and the spiritual formation of the Monastery of St. Macarius. He was the author of hundreds of spiritual books and scholarly articles.

new terms are often created.”¹⁴⁴ Moreover consistent with his Alexandrian predecessors discussed above, Gregorios ascertains that while it is important to update philosophical expressions, theological meanings are not merely developed philosophically but are rather mystically revealed through a life of prayer.¹⁴⁵ He further argues, “The Godhead and the Manhood are united in Him in a complete union, i.e. in essence, hypostasis and nature. There is no separation or division between the Godhood and the Manhood of our Lord ... In other words we may speak of two natures before the union took place, but after the union there is but ONE nature, ONE nature having the properties of the two natures.”¹⁴⁶ He also states: “The Godhead and the Manhood are united not in the sense of a mere combination (συνάρηια) or connection or junction, but they are united in the real sense of the word union ... this union is a real union.”¹⁴⁷ Bishop Gregorios is quick to discern that, “There is no duality here between the natures ... This is a real proof of the Union in the sense in which the non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches profess it.”¹⁴⁸ According to him, this dualistic view of the one reality creates “a dangerous expression against our salvation. If there were two natures in Christ after the union, then the redemption of Christ was an act of His humanity, for it is the flesh that was crucified.”¹⁴⁹ Dualism here will isolate the work of Christ to certain aspects of him, which reduces his totality and the apparent mutability of his hypostasis since his humanity would seem to operate temporally and not as an integral part of his eternal reality.

As mentioned earlier, no matter how hard theologians try to articulate the *hypostatic* union, it remains transcendent to our rational categories as it is a great divine mystery. Similar to Gregorios’ thinking, Torrance asserts:

¹⁴⁴ Waheeb Atalla Girgis, “The Christological Teaching of the Non-Chalcedonian Churches” (Cairo: The Coptic Orthodox Theological University College, 1951), 4.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

the doctrine of Christ is the doctrine of *the mystery of the true divine nature and the true human nature in one person* ... In Christ something has taken place which is so new that it is related to our ordinary knowledge only at its extreme edges; if it is apprehended by us it must be apprehended from outside the limits of our ordinary human experience and thought. It is a new and unique reality which has certainly invaded our human life but which we can know only by refusing to categorize it in the sphere of what we already know.¹⁵⁰

Therefore, speaking of the *hypostatic* union has to be guarded by *apophatic* language because it is a personal union of its own kind. Torrance refers to it as *sui generis*.¹⁵¹ He emphasizes the reality of the mystery affirming that the hypostatic union is a matter of mystery. Hence, the four *apophatic* terms describe the one reality of Christ. The union of divinity and humanity is without confusion, without division, without change, and without separation.¹⁵²

It is rather fascinating to see that despite their apparent differences, both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Christians employ the same *apophatic* terms to refer to the union. As this Chalcedonian *apophatic* formula is celebrated in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, it is also clearly celebrated in the Coptic tradition. Bishop Gregorios states that "contrary to Eutyches, the non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches profess that Christ is ONE nature in which are completely preserved all the human properties as well as all the divine properties, without confusion, without mixture, and without alteration, a profession which the Coptic celebrant priest cries out in the liturgy holding up the paten with his hands."¹⁵³ Indeed, in the Coptic Orthodox liturgy, the priest declares in a loud voice, "I believe and confess to the last breath that this is the life-giving Flesh that Your only-begotten Son, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, took from our Lady, the Lady of us all, the holy Theotokos, Saint Mary. He made It one with His divinity without mingling, without

¹⁵⁰ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 83.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁵³ Giris, "The Christological Teaching of the Non-Chalcedonian Churches," 7.

confusion, and without alteration.”¹⁵⁴ Therefore, it is evident that the Coptic tradition upholds the apophatic language guarding the union. Additionally, the Coptic Bright Saturday liturgical rite states, “you became man like us, O only-begotten God, without alteration or change.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Coptic Psalmody says, “the true God, of the true God, who was incarnate, of you without change,”¹⁵⁶ and more succinctly, “Jesus Christ the Word, who was incarnate without alteration, became a perfect man. Without alteration of His being, or mingling or separation of any kind after the unity. For of one nature, one hypostasis, and one person, is the Word of God.”¹⁵⁷ Liturgical texts are clearly indicative of the dogmatic views of the Coptic Church and its practices point to its faith that the union is guarded by the four apophatic statements mentioned in Chalcedon. However, these four apophatic statements while describing the union between humanity and divinity reflect a unitary reality of the person of Jesus Christ.

The writings of Fr. Matthew the Poor, who was pivotal to the revival of the development of doctrinal theology in the Coptic Church and the Orthodox tradition at large, always reflect a deep spirituality and Christocentric life through which he gained the illumination to understand divine revelation and the mysteries of faith. Although Fr. Matthew does not directly address the nature(s) of Christ as a main topic in any of his works, he explains his Christological view from the faith he received throughout his life from the Church fathers and the Coptic liturgical tradition in his various commentaries on the gospels and Pauline epistles. He states: “the faith of the Church that the nature of Christ who is born in Bethlehem is one nature of the incarnate Word — the Son of God — is a faith which places us now and today in front of a realistic truth which is that God is fully and perfectly

¹⁵⁴ Basil, Gregory, and Cyril, *The Divine Liturgy: The Anaphoras of Saints Basil, Gregory, and Cyril*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, 2007), 233.

¹⁵⁵ See Psali Watos of Bright Saturday, in *Coptic Orthodox Rite of The Holy Pascha*, n.d., 553.

¹⁵⁶ See the Sunday Theotokia, part 5 in *The Holy Psalmody* (Ridgewood, NY: Saint Mary and Saint Antonios Coptic Orthodox Church, n.d.), 95.

¹⁵⁷ See the Monday Theotokia, part 6 in *Holy Psalmody of Kiahk: According to the Orders of the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 1st ed. (Pierrefonds, QC, Canada: Saint George and Saint Joseph Coptic Orthodox Church, 2008), 55.

encountering us in the person of Christ."¹⁵⁸ He further explains that the one nature of Christ as a realistic truth is an ontological expression where "the word 'truth' here is ἀληθινόν, as a characteristic of light, means perfect truth which is self-illuminated with an invincible power. Truth which is not limited by time or space and is not affected by any condition, one which does not only reveal the visible, but the hidden things of the heart and the conscience and which also shines in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."¹⁵⁹ He also says "the word 'truth' or αληθινή means that which is rooted in the essence of facts and their origin. The 'truth' in Christ is not an image, likeness, or symbol, but the essence and the radix which is immutable, incorruptible, and infinite."¹⁶⁰ Therefore, although Father Matthew uses terms like 'nature', his use of the word is rooted in an ontological sense, where reality is the root of faith. Additionally, he writes:

Truth or 'ἀλήθεια' in the New Testament is a realist expression which is heavily and powerfully repeated as an indication that Old Testament symbols, names, and characteristics were metaphors, images, and shadows of the truth ...The word 'truth' accompanies Christ in all his characteristics. He is 'the true light', 'the true bread', 'the true vine', 'truly you are the Son of God', 'truly risen', 'this is truly the Christ, the savior of the world', 'this is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world', and 'you have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth'. In all these instances, the word 'ἀλήθεια' which is truth or true, means the perfect act or the seamlessly immutable state which is beyond any doubt because it has been revealed fully and both visible materially and spiritually. It is also continuous realist ontology or a perfect constant essence. The word also denotes sensing the truth and comprehending it at the same time.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Mattá al-Miskīn, *The Feasts of Theophany*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (The Monastery of St. Macarius, 2011), 180.

¹⁵⁹ Mattá al-Miskīn, *The Faith in Christ*, 8th ed. (The Monastery of St. Macarius, 2013), 87.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 172–73.

Here, Father Matthew rejects Aristotelian dualism by affirming that the reality of divine 'truth' has been revealed both materially and spiritually. His theological realism and understanding of the unitary model is evident from his discussion of the notion of truth. In doing so, Fr. Matthew upholds his Alexandrian roots as founded by Athanasius and Cyril.

7. Implications of *Miaphysite* Christology

i. Implications on the Essence/Energy Distinction

Miaphysite Christology has far-reaching implications for various theological discussions. A primary example is the essence/energy distinction formulated by Gregory Palamas where the essence of God is distinct from his act. Torrance explains the initial effects of dualist thinking on this concept claiming that "dualism limits the theological component in biblical knowledge to what is logically derived from observations or appearances ... This means, for example, that it is impossible for us ever to know anything of Jesus Christ as he is in himself, for we are restricted to Jesus as he appeared to his contemporaries."¹⁶² He further explains that the "restriction of knowledge to what is observable or to what may be deduced from observation, operates only with the epistemological model of vision, thereby casting its dualism into the form of a visible realm, to which we have access only by intuition, and an invisible realm, to which we have access only by logical inference or hypothetico-deductive activity."¹⁶³ Here, we are faced with a clever and subtle dichotomy. First, essence or pure being is incapable of acting without personhood. So, the initial issue is that there is no need to distinguish between essence and act because essence is not the source of act, but the hypostases are; the argument is unnecessary. Second, when humanity is united to God, it is united to the person of the Son, not his essence, and union — as established earlier in Alexandrian theology — preserving the ontological gap between God and creatures. Torrance asserts, "in the act of creation, God does not communicate himself, but he creates a reality wholly distinct from himself, but here in Jesus Christ God acts in such a way

¹⁶² Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 28.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 29.

that he is himself in his act, and what he acts he is, and what he is he acts.”¹⁶⁴ Therefore, there is no need to be concerned about a confusion of humanity with God. Man Kei Ho argues: “Torrance criticizes that the dualist thought detaches not only Jesus from God, but also his message from his person.”¹⁶⁵ This means that dualism also creates a sort of schism in the Godhead where on account of our sins, there was a fracture within the Trinity. This is the sort of dualism on which some Western soteriological models are based, where the Father rejects the Son or pours his anger on the Son and turns his back on him. Torrance attacks this concept: “Jesus Christ is one person whose word is wholly involved in his person. We cannot therefore think of his person apart from his atoning work, or of his atoning work in abstraction from his person.”¹⁶⁶ He further explains, “His work in the flesh is one with his being Son of God. His action is his presence in act. His Word is his life in his speaking and living of it.”¹⁶⁷ Additionally, Torrance argues that God’s own innermost being and heart is being presented to men and women in union with him through his incarnation. His full presence among human beings is an “act which is identical with his own person”.¹⁶⁸ More succinctly, he notes, that through Christ, God does not share anything with humanity other than his very self.¹⁶⁹ This means, as Torrance claims, that “what Christ is in all his life and action, in his love and compassion, he is antecedently and eternally in himself as the eternal Son of the Father.”¹⁷⁰ He distinguishes between the acts of God internally and externally as *opus ad extra* and *opus ad intra* but not a distinction between essence and energy or being and act.

¹⁶⁴ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 107–8.

¹⁶⁵ Man Kei Ho, *A Critical Study on T. F. Torrance’s Theology of Incarnation* (Lausanne: Peter Lang, 2008), 46.

¹⁶⁶ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 37.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

ii. Implications on Human Personhood

Another vital implication of the *miaphysite* articulation of unitary reality is its effect on discussions of human personhood. Torrance advocates that having a unitary, as opposed to a dualist, theological outlook will highly impact the way we engage with culture, science, and philosophy. He keeps asking, “what happens when we move from a dualist outlook to a unitary outlook, and to the realist modes of thought that arise in such an outlook, in which we have restored to us the Unity of form and being.”¹⁷¹ He further claims that the modern Church is perhaps imprisoned in Greco-Roman dualist modes of thinking where the Church has allowed this worldview to simply control all aspects of life.¹⁷² He adds that many aspects of Alexandrian thought were lost stating, “the great advances in Alexandrian science, and the extensive interconnection between science and theology worked out there, were largely lost, if only because in the Augustinian dualist outlook, this world of space and time has no ultimate place in the Christian hope, but belongs to the world that passes away — that is, the world out of which we must be saved.”¹⁷³ He provides the answer to this problem saying, “This is where an alert theology has an all-important role to play, in constructive as well as critical activity, in demanding and carrying through a significant shift in the meaning of ordinary terms to cope with the new insights and in creating new forms of expression opposite to new truth where the adaptation of old forms of speech and thought does not prove adequate.”¹⁷⁴ It is within the context of his invitation that I offer the following reconstruction of theological concepts.

Torrance thinks that “the formulation of our concepts requires constant revision and the concepts themselves require constant reconstruction in the interest of purity of thought as well as advance in knowledge.”¹⁷⁵ In light of this appropriate understanding of the use of $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ and *hypostasis* as truth and concrete reality, and

¹⁷¹ Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, ix.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 19.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

the unnecessary distinction between essence and energy in the Alexandrian mind, we must examine whether or not humanity can be adequately described as having personhood. We must assess if the *en/anhypostatic* distinction is adequately and properly used and applied. Furthermore, we must revise these definitions and how they may affect our understanding of the theology, and precisely what it means when Christ is described as having a 'full humanity'. John Zizioulas describes a person, as distinct from an individual, saying:

Being a person is basically different from being an individual or 'personality' in that the person cannot be conceived in itself as a static entity, but only as it relates to. Thus personhood implies the 'openness of being', and even more than that, the ek-stasis of being, i.e. a movement towards communion which leads to a transcendence of the boundaries of the 'self' and thus to freedom. At the same time, and in contrast to the partiality of the individual which is subject to addition and combination, the person in its ecstatic character reveals its being in a catholic, i.e. integral and undivided, way, and thus in its being ecstatic it becomes hypostatic, i.e. the bearer of its nature in its totality.¹⁷⁶

This understanding of personhood generally leads us to question the colloquial way in which we refer to human entities as persons and how our personhood relates to the personhood of Christ. Is person an accurate description of our fallen state? Or is personhood falsely attributed to our distorted nature?

The question then becomes: are we as human beings the bearers of our reality in its totality? Do we possess the totality of what it means to be human? Based on an Alexandrian perspective, I would argue that we are the bearers of our fallen reality, a reality of servitude to sin and not the totality of our reality, i.e. eschatological life. Torrance clarifies this notion based on his Athanasian understanding saying, "But the Chalcedonian statement does not say that this human nature of Christ was human nature 'under the servitude to sin' as Athanasius insisted; it does not say that it was corrupt human nature taken from

¹⁷⁶ John D. Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28.5 (1975): 408.

our fallen creation, where human nature is determined and perverted by sin."¹⁷⁷ The 'diseased humanity', therefore, is not the perfect humanity; it is not the real humanity that was created at the beginning. The true humanity is that of Jesus Christ, and "far from measuring its truth and fullness by our human nature, we must judge the poverty of our human nature by the perfection and the fullness of his human nature."¹⁷⁸ That is not to say that Christ had a human nature which is different than ours, but as Torrance stated, he is like us and he is unlike us. He is like us "in our frail, feeble and corrupt and temptable humanity, yet without being himself a sinner."¹⁷⁹

This understanding impacts how we comprehend the *an-enhypostatic* distinction and, additionally, the concept of human personhood in the current fallen state. The *an-enhypostatic* distinction implies that *our* humanity is somewhat unreal, or incomplete. It is Christ — who is eternally the perfect and most real human — who has 'in history' put on the 'distorted human shirt' until his resurrection. But then, after the resurrection, we humans put on the perfect and most real humanity. In other words, employing Athanasius' notion of the 'exchange', one could argue that Christ has put on the humanity that was in servitude to sin, so that we may put on the humanity that is in the true and real image and likeness of God; more precisely, so that we may become the 'bearers of its totality'. It is in this manner that the Alexandrian fathers interchange their use of the terms *physis* and *hypostasis*, because what is 'real' is what 'bears its own totality'.

Furthermore, the Alexandrian fathers' notion of the hypostatic union is about the unity between the hypostatic and the *anhypostatic* where the hypostatic is the "one who gives ... reality."¹⁸⁰ This is precisely what Athanasius meant when he wrote, "God had special pity for the human race, seeing that by its nature it would not be able to persist forever', that is, the human race might, as a result of

¹⁷⁷ Torrance, *Incarnation*, 201.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁸⁰ Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1461.

transgression, return to its original nature, to non-existence.”¹⁸¹ The distorted humanity is incapable of persisting forever because it had lost its concrete reality when it declared itself independently divine. The *en-anhypostatic* distinction, therefore, should be applied on the fallen human nature, not to Christ. *Anhypostatic* would mean “that human nature is not a person independent of Christ.”¹⁸²

While *enhypostatic* would mean that the distorted human nature is assumed and healed by the person of the Son and given existence in the existence of God — as opposed to going back to non-existence as Athanasius mentioned — and therefore co-exists in the divine hypostasis of the Son. In this manner, the shirt of humanity which Christ puts on is not humanity *par excellence*, it is, rather, the fallen humanity. It would only appear logical that in his resurrected form, Christ has divested himself from the feeble and fallen human *natura* which is characterized by its servitude to sin, because it is not how humanity was initially created. Therefore, in wearing Christ through Baptism, we enter into his concrete reality and we unite personally with him and only then do we also become “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.”¹⁸³

8. Conclusion

Thomas F. Torrance spent a great deal of his life studying the Alexandrian fathers and came to realize the true meaning of their expressions. His ability to master the Alexandrian tradition, particularly through the writings of Clement, Athanasius, and Cyril, opened his eyes to the erroneous ways Coptic Christology has been interpreted. In his attempt to support the *miaphysite* non-Chalcedonian position, he reintroduced the writings of John Philoponos and, along with it, the Coptic understanding that “*Physis* describes actual reality which confronts us in its own independent being, and which is known in accordance with its own inherent force or natural force in virtue of which it continues to be what it actually and properly is.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, PG 25.101 A, PG 25.104 BC.

¹⁸² Torrance, *Incarnation*, 105.

¹⁸³ Hebrews 1:3.

¹⁸⁴ Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 211.

Therefore, for Torrance, as well as the Copts, “the terms φύσις and ἀλήθεια, nature and reality, were more or less synonymous in their use.”¹⁸⁵ In this context, Torrance further insisted that “we cannot understand *physis* by reading *natura* into it.”¹⁸⁶ This understanding has properly reflected the non-Chalcedonian position that Jesus Christ “is not two realities, a divine and a human, joined or combined together, but one reality who confronts us as he who is both God and man.”¹⁸⁷ This is also clear from the sampled writings of modern Coptic theologians like Fr. Matthew the Poor, Bishop Gregorios, as well as the historic and daily celebrated Coptic liturgical texts.

The works of Torrance have certainly opened a new horizon for the dialogue between the non-Chalcedonian and Chalcedonian families and have shown the Copts’ continuous correct reading of their own theology and history. This is evident through Torrance’s success in the reintegration of John Philoponos as an Orthodox theologian and his pivotal role in lifting the anathemas against his writings by the Greek Orthodox Church. This opens up the capacity for ecumenical engagement between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches.

¹⁸⁵ Torrance, *Theological and Natural Science*, 100.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁸⁷ Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 56.