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THE VAGARIES OF THEOLOGY:

Thomas F. Torrance and Practical Theology

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Abstract: *The discipline of systematic theology or Christian dogmatics is routinely critiqued for being esoteric and abstract, in short, impractical. This is opposed to the discipline of Practical Theology, which is said to be a part of the theological curriculum that applies the fruit of systematic theology to practical issues. The systematic theology of Thomas F. Torrance is representative of the task of dogmatics, and various forms of Indigenous or contextual theology are representative forms of Practical Theology. It will be argued that systematic theology is not impractical and that Practical Theology, as it is often practiced today, is at risk of being atheological. An argument will be made for the practical nature of systematic theology as illustrated by the fecundity of Torrance's theology for pastoral theology.*[1]

Keywords: Systematic Theology, Practical Theology, Indigenous Theology, Counselling, Thomas F. Torrance, Contextual Theology, Interdisciplinary Studies

[1] I am grateful for reviewer comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. Dogmatics is Practical Theology

Even though Thomas F. Torrance is not well-known for his practical theology, his work is fecund with ethical and practical insights and does include more practical theology that critics often imagine.[2] Part of the perception problem facing Torrance's theology is a fundamental misunderstanding of what Christian dogmatics is, especially as Torrance carried it out. For many, dogmatics seems to be an exercise in arcane speculation that has been removed from most people's lived experiences. For others, theology involves esoteric musings on impractical topics.[3] On the other hand, Practical Theology is said to be that discipline that begins with "human experience and its desire to reflect theologically on that experience."[4] That, at least, is how John Swinton and Harriet Mowat define Practical Theology in their influential primer. Further, Practical Theology addresses the primary question: "is what *appears* to be going on within this situation what is *actually* going on?"[5] Further still, we read that "we often discover that what we *think* we are doing is quite different from what we are *actually* doing. Thus, through a process of critical reflection on situations, the Practical Theologian seeks to ensure faithful practice and authentic human living in the light of scripture [sic] and tradition."[6]

Without a wholesale dismissal, Torrance would, I think, diagnose details of Swinton and Mowat's definition of Practical Theology as a species of the "Latin Heresy." The Latin Heresy was a term Torrance coined to describe the many ingrained dualisms that have crept into Christian (and secular) thought, which all trace their roots in theology back to a bifurcation between Christ and his work.[7]

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[2] See, for example, the essays collected in "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and Ethics," *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* 5 (2015): https://tftorrance.org/journal-05.

[3] For one example that notes this attitude and attempts to combat it, see Robert Banks, *Redeeming the Routines: Bringing Theology to Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993).

[4] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), v.

[5] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research,* v.

[6] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research,* vi.

[7] See Thomas F. Torrance, "Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986): 461–82.

Practical Theology, a modern addition to the theological curriculum, has tended to perpetuate the dualisms Torrance diagnosed in its caricature of dogmatics as impractical and Practical Theology as the discipline that takes experience seriously. We find a different picture when we compare that dualistic notion to how Torrance speaks of dogmatics.

> In a 1980 work, Torrance defined the task of theology not as:
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> some system of ideas laid down on the ground of external preconceptions and authorities, not some useless, abstract stuff concerned with detached, merely academic questions, nor again some man-centred ideology that we think up for ourselves out of our socio-political involvements with one another, but the actual knowledge of the living God as he is disclosed to us through his interaction with us in our world of space and time—knowledge of God that is ultimately controlled by the nature of God as he is in himself.[8]

In a later work, he elaborated on this definition with these words:

> Dogmatics is not the systematic study of the sanctioned dogmas of the Church, but the elucidation of the full content of revelation, of the Word of God as contained in Scripture, and as such is concerned with the intrinsic and permanent truth which church doctrine in every age is meant to express. It is 'systematic' only in the sense that every part of Christian truth is vitally connected with every other part. No doctrine can be admitted that does not bring to expression some aspect of the redemption that is in Christ.'[9]

These definitions make clear the goal and intent of theology as Torrance understood it. The way Torrance defined theology does not suggest that it is divorced from or antithetical to human experience. As Myk Habets has argued in a Torrancean tone:

> Properly understood, Christian dogmatics is fundamentally about one thing and one thing only, Christ clothed with his Gospel. As such Christ occupies the controlling centre of the church's life, thought, and mission in the world.

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[8] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1980), 15–16.

[9] Thomas F. Torrance, "Hugh Ross Mackintosh: Theologian of the Cross," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 5 (1987): 161.

> Dogmatics occupies itself with an ontological (ultimate) commitment to the incarnate presence and activity of God in Jesus Christ within the objectivities and intelligibilities of our human existence in space-time. Theology serves both the reality of God's articulate self-revelation to humanity and the reality of the creaturely world to which we belong, in the integrity and wholeness of the life, teaching, and activity of the historical and risen Jesus Christ.[10] In short, theology is about Jesus. If theology is about Jesus, then it is also about the triune God and his ways in the world. Theology is also about the world. The triune God, Christ, creation—these are the themes which dominate Christian dogmatics.[11]

Consistent with Torrance's definition, but bringing out more clearly the implications of Christian belief, is that offered by Beth Felker Jones, who writes, "Christian theology is a conversation about Scripture, about how to read and interpret it better, how to understand the Bible as a whole and imagine a way of life that is faithful to the God whose Word this is."[12] As Jones's book clarifies, theology is incomplete if it does not address Christian *practices*. Indeed, theology is not theology without this practical commitment.

> The study of doctrine belongs right in the middle of the Christian life. It is part of our worship of God and service to God's people. Jesus commanded us to love God with our mind as well as our heart, soul, and strength (Luke 10:27). All four are connected: the heart's passion, the soul's yearning, the strength God grants us, and the intellectual task of seeking the truth of God. This means that the study of doctrine is an act of love for God: in studying the things of God, we are formed as worshipers and as God's servants in the world. To practice doctrine is to yearn for a deeper understanding of the

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[10] Adapted from Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology: The Realism of Christian Revelation,* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 9.

[11] Adapted from Myk Habets, "Thinking Theologically," in *Doing Integrative Theology: Word, World, and Work in Conversation,* ed. Philip Halstead and Myk Habets (Auckland: Archer Press, 2015), 28.

[12] Beth Felker Jones, *Practicing Chrisitan Doctrine: An Introduction to Thinking and Living Theologically,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2023), 2.

> Christian faith, to seek the logic and the beauty of that faith, and to live our what we have learned in the everyday realities of the Christian life.[13]

It is evident that dogmatics is as practical as it is theoretical, and separating the two creates an unnecessary dualism. This is not to say that it is a bad idea in a theological curriculum to have courses focused on the practical or applied nature of Christian discipleship, such as preaching, pastoral care, and so forth, just as dogmatics courses focus on Christology or pneumatology, and so forth. But it is to argue that these 'practical' courses are part of the dogmatic enterprise itself and that dogmatics proper is concerned with lived experience.

Added to this argument against creating a false dualism between dogmatics and Practical Theology is Torrance's self-stated methodology of Critical Realism (CR). While CR includes a complex and diverse cluster of definitions, arguments, and modalities, at its core are several defining features, including the recognition that ontology precedes epistemology, that reality can be understood and investigated throughout various (typically three) domains—the Empirical, Actual, and Real[14]—and that examining reality involves adopting the specific methodology that is appropriate to the objects of study (what Torrance referred to as *kata physin*).[15] It is important here that a critical realist approach to dogmatics takes experiences seriously and then investigates the Actual domain before finally articulating the Real domain.[16] Only then does dogmatics proceed to work from the top down, as it were, from the higher scientific level of theological formulae down to the experiential level. All orthodox theology is done *a posteriori*, in this case, after Jesus. Jesus is, as the Fathers referred to him, the *Scopus* of Scripture and, hence,

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[13] Jones, *Practicing Chrisitan Doctrine*, 2.

[14] These are terms Roy Bhaskar uses, Torrance uses different terms such as Evangelical/ Doxological, Theological, and Higher Theological. The terminological differences are just that, terminological.

[15] For a discussion of Torrance's Critical Realism, see Myk Habets, *Theology in Transposition: A Constructive Appraisal of T.F. Torrance* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 27–65, especially 51–59.

[16] Roy Bhaskar, *Critical Realism* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

the scope of theology.[17] The stratification of knowledge is central to Torrance's notion of theology and offers a critique of the false dichotomy that exists for some between dogmatics and Practical Theology.

Having briefly shown that a proper definition of dogmatics includes the practical or applied dimensions of the Christian life, it is worth looking at several examples of Practical Theology to see if they are applications of theology or something entirely different from Christian theology. Contemporary Practical Theology takes many forms; two will be examined here to illustrate the ingrained problems facing the theological curriculum today: first, certain so-called Indigenous theologies, and second, certain applications of theology to practical issues, in this case, a 'Trinitarian' construal of counselling. The examples offered below are selective and the majority are drawn from the geographical context of the author. It is not the case that all Practical Theology suffers from the problems listed below, nor is the argument such that all Practical Theologians are necessarily committed to the various moves made by the exemplars below.[18] Rather, the argument being made here is more selective and focused. Namely, the way Practical Theology is sometimes practiced, especially in the South Pacific (but not restricted to that area), is *a*theological and is, therefore, a different discipline altogether. This argument merely serves the larger purpose to show how dogmatics is practical how certain practical theologies need to become more dogmatic.

2. The Practices of Some Practical Theology

That Jesus Christ is the primary locus of study is lost on some (not all) Practical Theologians, who wrongly assume that individual human experience—socially constructed or empirically observed—must function as the primary locus of Christian study, or nature itself, or some other foundational principle other than

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[17] See the discussion in Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 219, 376.

[18] A long list of Practical Theologians could be made who model the sorts of Interdisciplinary studies called for in this paper, those who rigorously apply theology to specific areas of life. Included in such a list would be Ray Anderson, Andrew Purves, Michael Jinkins, Julie Canlis, Cherith Fee Nordling, Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, Kyle Strobel, Kent Eilers, Graham Buxton, and many more.

Christ. Note Torrance's definition: theology is not "some system of ideas laid down on the ground of external preconceptions and authorities. … nor again some man-centred ideology that we think up for ourselves out of our socio-political involvements with one another."[19] In addition, certain construals of Practical Theology have adopted the approach of basing its foundations on natural theology and accommodating any specific biblical or theological content to that already perceived natural theology, as we shall see below. Still further, the only natural theology acceptable is a localized, indigenized knowledge of the world derived from culture, either indigenous in the first instance or philosophical in the second. There is nothing new in these approaches; they are the classical forms of non-Christian theology, and in the past, they have typically been subsumed under the categories of religion, religious knowledge, or, more recently, sociology. Common to each approach is a refusal to let special revelation critique, question, or alter the already adopted worldview or knowledge of the culture or person in question. We see these approaches beginning to dominate the discourse of Practical Theology in certain areas, as illustrated below.

2.1 Indigenous Theology as Practical Theology

The non-theological basis of certain forms of Practical Theology can be illustrated in several ways, including a rejection of biblical authority, a constructivist as opposed to realist epistemology, a radical commitment to natural theology as opposed to special revelation, and an *a priori* commitment to ethnic or philosophical foundations which Christian theology must conform to, resulting in forms of Gnosticism, syncretism, pantheism, and animism.[20] To illustrate, we may examine the work of several Indigenous scholars, largely drawn from the South Pacific.

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[19] Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 15.

[20] There are many fine examples of Indigenous and contextual theology, too many to list here. A select bibliography would include: José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1989); the many contributors to John Parratt's two edited works *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, new edition (London: SPCK, 1997) and *An Introduction to Third World Theologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Michael Nazir-Ali, *The Unique and Universal Christ* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008); and Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

Tongan scholar Jione Havea's work is touted as exemplary of Indigenous theology and, hence, as illustrative of Practical Theology.[21] However, there is little in Havea's work that would identify him as a *Christian* scholar if, by Christian, one means working within the long tradition of Christian thought and not simply as a religious commentator on Christianity.[22] This would seem to be supported by his contention that theology (including biblical studies) is simply part of the discipline of sociology, an odd claim given that the discipline of sociology is a nineteenth-century phenomenon.[23] It is hard to identify what Havea's specific criteria are in discerning what is worthy of being counted as acceptable theology, although several of his key commitments are clear. In a fashion that has more to do with Foucault than his Indigenous context,[24] his work attempts to deconstruct theology and Christianity. Of course, in deconstruction, there is no attempt to reconstruct; deconstruction is the purpose and goal of the enterprise. Havea's work deconstructs forms of Christianity, which he characterizes as colonial, oppressive, old-fashioned, out of date, and worse. In its place is a version of cultural adherence in a religious guise. But again, what criteria are used to determine authenticity, truth, reality, or whatever the standard is? It appears the only criterion is the predilection of the scholar, in this case, what Havea likes or does not like, or what he thinks does or does not work, in short, a form of pragmatism. Context is merely a foil to make and illustrate these personal claims. This is supported by Havea's dislike of "contextual theology," something he thinks is a "white" project.[25] Theology is merely an

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[21] John Barton of Oxford University calls Havea an "important voice" and worth reading, in a review of Havea's work *Losing Ground* in *The Church Times* (28 Jan 2022): "Losing Ground: Reading Ruth in the Pacific by Jione Havea (churchtimes.co.uk);" and Jacqueline Hidalgo of Williams College describes his work as "profound, incisive, and fun," when referring to his *Jonah: An Earth Bible Commentary*, www.bloomsbury.com/us/jonah-an-earth-bible-commentary-9780567704818/.

[22] No comment on a person's personal faith is being made here or should be implied.

[23] Jione Havea, "Dialogues: Anthropology and Theology," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S) 28 (2022): 299.

[24] Havea explicitly draws on Foucault's work, along with that of Derrida, and others, in *Elusions of Control: Biblical Law on the Word of Women* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

[25] Havea, "Dialogues: Anthropology and Theology," 299.

inconvenience that needs to be removed, as seen in his quip on the sacrament, "It's feeding rather than theology that's more important to me."[26]

Havea's work displays many of the traits of much of contemporary Indigenous theology, which, in turn, is touted as an exemplary form of Practical Theology. But there is nothing here that is ostensibly *Christian* theology. Whereas Christian theology has concerned itself with understanding God as triune, or examining the two natures of Christ in the one person, and other such beliefs founded on divine self-revelation and their implications, Havea's work shows no concern over such issues; instead, his concern lies in constructing a version of Jesus Christ (and god) that his Tongan culture *already* accepts by other names, terms, and figures. Havea believes natives (his term) need to be freed from and converted away from "traditional topics and themes for theological reflection. Christology, trinity [sic], pneumatology, and the like are thieves in the night—lurking to hijack some unsuspecting local, native principle or teaching."[27]

Similarly, Tongan Methodist scholar Nāsili Vaka'uta sees most theology as the "dissemination of information or proclamation of dogmatic ideas that have long passed their usefulness."[28] Note that perceived usefulness (pragmatism) is again the yardstick of truth or relevance. The specific target of Vaka'utu's critique is levelled at "the orthodox theological position invented and propagated by the

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[26] Havea, "Dialogues: Anthropology and Theology," 302. The comment was made in reply to a question over his father's "Coconut Theology." Havea claims Coconut Theology is not a contextual theology but, rather, a way to say that if there is no bread, coconut is just as good.

[27] Havea, "Calling for CONversion," in *Theology as Threshold: Invitations from Aotearoa New Zealand,* ed. Jione Havea, Emily Colgan, and Nāsili Vaka'uta (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Press, 2022), 228. Te Aroha Rountree argues for something similar, wanting to cut behind the Bible back to a Māori theology/religion, even indiscriminately supporting ancient Māori practices that many would see as antithetical to the Gospel. See Te Aroha Rountree, "Once Was Colonized: Jesus Christ," in *Theology as Threshold: Invitations from Aotearoa New Zealand,* ed. Jione Havea, Emily Colgan, and Nāsili Vaka'uta (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Press, 2022), 165.

[28] Nāsili Vaka'uta, "Margins as Threshold," in *Theology as Threshold: Invitations from Aotearoa New Zealand,* ed. Jione Havea, Emily Colgan, and Nāsili Vaka'uta (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Press, 2022), 15. The specific doctrines that are irrelevant are not mentioned, but his essay makes clear he is in total sympathy with Jione Havea, and so Trinity, Christology, pneumatology and so forth are the most obvious objects of his critique.

Constantinian church."[29] Whilst it is unclear exactly what his definition of the Constantinian church is, Vaka'utu believes theology, and here I assume he means any theology that Tongans or other Indigenous peoples do not invent, is "a *culturally intrusive* and *socially irrelevant* propaganda driven by a *misdiagnosis of humanity*, rooted in a *delusional view of reality*, and inspired to an extent by *misguided dogmatic interpretations* of scriptures."[30] As with many Indigenous theologians, culture is right, and Christian theology must conform to that.[31] The citation is instructive, however, for the sort of methodologies these forms of Practical Theology bring to the discipline.

Indigenous theologians see little place for the Bible in contemporary Christianity. When Havea turns to Scripture, he is quick to draw unsubstantiated conclusions, such as his interpretation of Genesis 19:35, as given in an interview, where Lot's two daughters plan to get him drunk and attempt to have children of their own with him. According to Havea, "it's the envy of patriarchy to be raped by someone, including your daughter, which is ridiculous. For me, it's a fantasy, a patriarchal fantasy."[32] The interview is brief but illustrates Havea's approach to Scripture; it is a cultural artefact of little authority, filled with mistakes, including both stories about Jesus and stories Jesus may have told. When giving an interview on a course he teaches on sex and the Bible, Havea was asked about his views on several of Christ's teachings on sexual moral purity.[33] Havea's response was to gently mock and chide Jesus as old-fashioned, a hypocritical man of his time. When commenting on homosexuality, he states, "The Bible does say in some places that it is a sin, but the Bible is how many thousands of years old? So why should we continue to hold on to those doctrines? I'd be the last person to deny that the Bible makes these

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[29] Vaka´uta, "Margins as Threshold," 16.

[30] Vaka´uta, "Margins as Threshold," 16 (emphasis in original).

[31] By Christian theology, here I intend a shorthand for a lengthier definition that would define theology as something like Christian reflection on divine revelation.

[32] Jione Havea, "Sex and the Bible: Jione Havea Q&A," interview by Stephen Acott, the Uniting Church of Australia, August 14, 2020. https://victas.uca.org.au/sex-and-the-bible-jione-havea-qa/.

[33] Havea, "Sex and the Bible: Jione Havea Q&A."

stupid laws. But why do we still value such out-of-date teachings?"[34] On the question of sex outside of marriage, Havea says the Bible teaches it, citing Abraham as the example, and on that basis, Havea affirms it. On lust, Havea thinks "Jesus missed the point" when he said that looking lustfully at a woman was a sin.[35] For Havea, lust is human, and hence, it is not sinful, even when Jesus lusted, which Havea unequivocally thinks Jesus did. In Havea's words, it is best to ignore such passages as being irrelevant. What we see in these specific instances with Havea can be multiplied many times over with other scholars and examples.

Issues of truth, goodness, beauty, and so forth are decided before coming to the text, and the text is read to conform to one's presuppositions. For Indigenous theologians, these presuppositions come from cultural and ethnic artefacts. As one reviewer of Havea's commentary on Jonah writes, his reading of the story "employs a largely unconstrained method that facilitates its ideological trajectory."[36] Again, the reviewer describes Havea's interpretive method as one that is "not bounded by the text."[37] The goal of the reading, the reviewer correctly notes, is to "transcend the constraints imposed by the narrator."[38] Havea describes his method as "fleeing from the narrator's design and agenda."[39]

In a similar fashion to Havea is Randy Woodley, a child of "mixed-blood Cherokees,"[40] who writes as an Indigenous theologian.[41] Woodley provides a

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[34] Havea, "Sex and the Bible: Jione Havea Q&A."

[35] Havea, "Sex and the Bible: Jione Havea Q&A."

[36] Yitzhak Berger, "Review of Havea, *Jonah: An Earth Bible Commentary,*" *Review of Biblical Literature* 24 (2022): 140.

[37] Berger, "Review of Havea," 143.

[38] Berger, "Review of Havea," 140.

[39] Jione Havea, *Jonah: An Earth Bible Commentary,* Earth Bible Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 14.

[40] Randy S. Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview: A Decolonized Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 2.

[41] A "native American legal descendent recognized by the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma," Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 14.

corroborating example from outside of the Pacific. He explicitly states, "I don't believe the scriptures should have ever been written or translated for our people."[42] He backs this up with a story.

> My Kiowa mother said it this way: "Before the White man came, we knew who God was. We knew God was the Creator, We knew God was powerful. We knew God was loving. We knew God was sacred. We didn't quite know how much God loved us because we didn't know the story of Jesus." Then she looked at me and said, "But we were this close" (holding her fingers apart an inch). "But when the missionaries came and gave us their theology, that made the gap as wide as the Grand Canyon."[43]

Havea is not as explicit as Woodley, but he appears to think the same way. Havea likens Scripture to food and makes the point that Pasifika people like *unhealthy* food, and that is why they like the Bible; it is full of "unhealthy and toxic" food.[44] We must realize, writes Havea, that some "biblical texts and interpretations are unhealthy and toxic."[45] Still later, he is overt that relating to churches will be difficult because his "readings are critical of the Bible."[46] In an ambiguous conclusion, we read Havea's appeal "that islander criticism could add to the ongoing conversations around context and biblical scholarship. When will we read 'rejection history' (by readers who refuse to be cornered by the Bible) within the 'reception history' of the Bible?"[47] It is unclear, but it would seem that Havea is, in part, calling

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[42] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 50.

[43] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 74.

[44] Jione Havea, "Islander Criticism: Waters, Ways, Worries," in *Sea of Readings: the Bible in the South Pacific* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2018), 13. He writes, "While that is not the true reason why we embrace the Bible, it makes the point that we have a liking for unhealthy feed [sic] (read: Bible)," *ibid.,* 13.

[45] Havea, "Islander Criticism," 13.

[46] Havea, "Islander Criticism," 18.

[47] Havea, "Islander Criticism," 18.

on churches to reject the Bible and its so-called toxic content. If so, then he and Woodley appear to agree.[48]

Vaka'uta is equally clear: the Bible is part and parcel of an imposition of orthodoxy upon a foreign culture and brings an agenda that is "largely alien and contradictory to the life-world, traditions, values, and worldviews that people from other contexts treasured."[49] Note here that he is not speaking against Western interpretations of Scripture but against the imposition of Scripture itself. The idea that Scripture might be sacred, divinely inspired, or infallible is "outdated" and needs to be rejected, according to Vaka'utu.[50] Furthermore, to think "the Bible, therefore, is the sole authority for life and faith," or that it "has everything a person needs to guide him or her unto salvation," is "self-deceptive."[51] Indigenous theologians such as the ones examined here prioritize local stories over the Scriptures, with many even rejecting the usefulness of Holy Scripture itself.[52]

According to Woodley, "It took thousands of years for Indigenous peoples to develop our particular ethics and values," derived from dreams, visions, ceremonies, and revelations. As such, these do not need to be replaced by the biblical narrative. These ancient and indigenous stories and epistemologies "were probably more accurate, so, the stories should have been told, and we would have learned the stories."[53] One example of many to illustrate this in practice is

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[48] Havea does not reject the place of sacred scriptures, but he does not limit this to the Bible nor to written texts. Jione Havea, "Engaging Scriptures from Oceania," in *Bible Borders Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania,* ed. Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and Eliane M. Wainwright. Semia Studies 75 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 3-19.

[49] Nāsili Vaka'uta, "Margins as Threshold," in *Theology as Threshold: Invitations from Aotearoa New Zealand,* ed. Jione Havea, Emily Colgan, and Nāsili Vaka'uta (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Press, 2022), 16–17.

[50] Vaka'uta, "Margins as Threshold," 17.

[51] Vaka'uta, "Margins as Threshold," 17.

[52] Havea, "Engaging Scriptures from Oceania," 15. As with Woodley, Havea sees legends, myths, songs, dances, and practices as much sacred scripture as the Bible, and often more important and more central for Pasifika peoples.

[53] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 50–51.

Woodley's advocacy for a form of animism.[54] He writes that his people, the Keetoowah, are:

> part of what we call stomp dance culture. That's our religion. It comes from the Sun, which is the most visible thing that we can see, and some of us think of the Creator as being behind the Sun; Creator is the one behind everything, and the Sun is a representation of all that. In the so-called 'Sun-Cult' tribes you'll see a lot of pottery with this (and in my own tattoos). But you would see that Sun symbol, the ancient Sun symbol and then our fire, which represents God as the incarnation of God coming down to earth.[55]

Havea, too, like many Indigenous theologians, prefers stories, especially oral stories, over other forms of communication. As such, Holy Scripture is relegated to a minor cultural document with little to no authority over the lives of Christians today.[56]

Across many Indigenous theologies, we see a remarkable similarity. Like Havea, Woodley identifies the earth as his self-stated starting point for theology.[57] According to Woodley, "I can pretty much find any kind of belief system or understanding I have and trace it back to the land."[58] Starting with the earth means starting in and with creation and forming ideas and convictions from there. In traditional theological language, this is called natural theology. Because Woodley's theology is built entirely on natural theology, he believes that "God has a covenant relationship with all people,"[59] not an exclusive redemptive covenant with Israel and now with the Church. Instead, Woodley believes his people, and all Indigenous

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[54] Also see Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 76, 77.

[55] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldvie*w, 47.

[56] Jione Havea, "Wet Bible: Stor(y)ing Jonah with Sia Figel," in Jione Havea, *Sea of Readings: The Bible in the South Pacific* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2018), 37–51.

[57] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 7.

[58] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 58. When challenged about this, he says his response is to say, "What do you stand on in order to talk to the Creator?" 58.

[59] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 25.

peoples, can cut back behind Jesus and Israel and find the original intentions of the Creator for Indigenous people in each area.[60] To be clear, special revelation is rejected in favour of natural theology, but one localized and indigenized to a people group (Cherokee, Tongan, Samoan, and so forth). Woodley provides many examples of this in action, but one will suffice when he recounts the story of a Dakota medical doctor who said: "'Long before I ever heard of Christ or saw a white man, I had learned from an untutored woman the essence of morality. With the help of dear Nature herself, she taught me things simple but of mighty import. I knew God. I perceived what goodness is. I saw and loved what is really beautiful.'"[61] This approach has historical precedent and fulfils all the criteria for Gnosticism. Gnosticism, an ancient heresy, refers to movements that claim special, divine knowledge (*gnosis*) gained through some form of heightened spirituality.[62] As John Behr has made clear, "the encounter with God takes place in the interiority of the heart, and it is this experience which comes to expression in diverse writings. … One has direct access to truth itself, that which has inspired what is true in various writings."[63] For Gnosticism, "doctrine is revelatory, rather than traditional, textual or rational."[64] Once this commitment is realized, there is no longer a commitment to the Bible as sacred Scripture.

C.S. Lewis, aware of this same thing during and after the war, writes of a soldier who had no time for theology; instead, this "hard-bitten" RAF officer had an experience with God on the field, alone at night in the desert and this "tremendous mystery" was all he needed. In reply to the officer, Lewis admits that he may have had a tremendous personal experience, which is precious. But, Lewis went on to say that it is not useful. Lewis likens theology to a map of the world and the man's experience as analogous to someone who goes down to the beach and looks at the

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[60] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 43.

[61] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 74.

[62] On Gnosticism see Simone Petrement, *A Separate God: The Christian Origins of Gnosticism* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

[63] John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea,* Formation of Christian Theology vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 21.

[64] Behr, *The Way to Nicaea,* 21.

water. The looking is real, the experience might be fun and alluring, but without a map, the man does not know what he is looking at, and he certainly can't navigate his way from Britain across the Atlantic to America. "In other words," writes Lewis, "theology is practical … If you do not listen to theology, that will not mean you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones—bad, muddled, out-of-date ideas. For a great many of the ideas about God which are trotted out as novelties today are simply old ones which real Theologians tried centuries ago and rejected."[65]

Starting with a natural theology has implications. Because Woodley begins with the earth, he rejects the personally revealed name of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for a title, "Creator,"[66] even though he frequently uses the name of Jesus.[67] Elsewhere, he says that "Jesus is Creator."[68] Eventually, Woodley simply states that "when I pray to Creator, and how I understand my people have been praying to Creator, I understand that they are and have been praying to Jesus."[69] Woodley does not mean his people know Jesus and use his name in prayer. Instead, he is doing what many Indigenous theologies do, he is re-naming the deities of his own culture with the name of *Jesus*, regardless of whether or not a person accepts Jesus. "Maybe they don't want to look at it that way, and that's okay. In my mind, they're still praying to Jesus. He is the Creator."[70] The use of *Jesus* by Woodley

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[65] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Collins, 2012), 155.

[66] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 10.

[67] Vaka'uta also starts with the earth and calls for "a transition from the idea of *world religions to earth religion*," (emphasis in original). Vaka´uta, "Margins as Threshold," 19.

[68] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 48. It is unclear if Woodley is a unitarian, a polytheist, or a Jesus-only advocate. He also refers to "Creator" as "the Great Mystery," and "truth", or "Christ." Each is synonymous. Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview,* 72.

[69] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 49. Later in the work, Woodley says that the actual name of Creator is "the Great Mystery," an impersonal title at best. Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldvie*w, 80. Woodley does recognise the name Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but finds no place for them in Indigenous theology. Instead, he simply sees these as Western names, or Christian names that represent what "Great Mystery" also achieves, that community is the basis of shalom, and that is all that counts. Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 87.

[70] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 49.

should not be assumed to mean the Jesus of history, the one revealed to us in Holy Scripture as the Lord and Saviour. Instead, for Woodley, "the Creator-Son being is a construct."[71] Allied to this is a rejection of any notion of God as Father, as this is said to be a product of "European theology."[72] For Havea's part, he refers to the divine or the deity with an apparently impersonal term, "G-d."[73] For Woodley and Havea, this clearly implements a syncretistic worldview. Finally, Woodley affirms a form of animism when he affirms, "native Americans understand all creation to have spirit, soul, or life force."[74] Here, Woodley is clearly advocating for the idea that Indigenous cultures, despite their practices or who they worship, are anonymous Jesus-followers, even if they are not Christians.[75] Woodley writes, "I'm not sure that Christianity *is* compatible with Indigenous values, but I'm pretty certain that following Jesus seems to be."[76] Later, he concludes, "You *can* be a Christian and follow Jesus, but it's very difficult."[77]

While reflecting on who God is for Woodley according to his Indigenous theology, it is worth noting his attempt to relate Jesus to the Creator and the Creator to some higher ideal of life that approximates the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity (despite failing in doing so). "Jesus exists in the perfect community—what I call the Community of Creator. And perfect shalom and deference for one another in this unity and diversity, which has its hallmark on all creation."[78] The

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[71] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 62.

[72] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 62.

[73] Jione Havea, "Bare Feet Welcome: Redeemer Xs Moses @ Enaim," in *Bible Borders Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania,* ed. Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and Eliane M. Wainwright. Semia Studies 75 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 217. I am aware that in Jewish literature G-D is a respectful way of identifying God without writing his name out for fear of accidental blasphemy. I am yet to find in Havea's work any rationale for his use of "G-D". My working assumption is this is a development on a practice that liberal scholars sometimes use when writing about God so as to avoid any suggestion that God was known or personally identifiable, namely, "G*D".

[74] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 65.

[75] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 88.

[76] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 44.

[77] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 45.

[78] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview,* 49.

vestiges of this "Community of Creator" are said to be seen in the fact that nothing exists in isolation; all things are plural. Woodley presents an ancient form of polytheism, a community of nameless deities who agree to work together for some common goal or end. The fingerprint or vestiges of the deity are found in any plurality in creation. Plurality is the principle, and our idea of God conforms to that. We will see the same move from another example of practical theology later when the doctrine of the Trinity is appealed to in order to support a community of relationality in a counselling context.

The work of Woodley is representative of Indigenous theologies like that of Havea and Vaka'utu, where natural theology is constructed based on ethnic identity, culture, and Gnostic ideologies. When accepted, Jesus-as-an-idea fits into the existing worldview and is renamed to conform to established spiritual norms. The Bible is relativised as a cultural text of little to no value to Indigenous peoples, and a Jesus-idea or concept is retained but one untethered from the biblical narrative. In such a scheme, "pedagogy is more important than content when we're teaching,"[79] and story replaces facts as the only truth. One example may suffice. Where the biblical narrative speaks of Adam and Eve as the first human parents, Woodley's people replace that with Selu and Kanati and see no need to find their identity bound up with a foreign Adam and Eve.[80] More than simply ascribing different names for the original humans in the biblical story (which is not a problem in itself), Selu and Kanati represent an entirely different story, with different values, history, and theology. The Bible's redemptive historical narrative becomes irrelevant to the people of Selu and Kanati. Therefore, a theology of the *imago Dei,* of sin, the fall, and redemption, as but a few representative elements of redemptive history, generally have little place or value to Woodley or Indigenous theologies of this kind.[81]

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[79] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 20.

[80] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 59.

[81] Vaka'uta is no different, orthodoxy, he believes, misdiagnoses the human condition "by claiming that we are essentially sinful and lost (cf. Gen 3 and the so-called fall of humanity), and therefore in need of salvation/redemption," Vaka΄uta, "Margins as Threshold," 17. Woodley seems to be arguing for the same thing. He explicitly rejects the concept of original sin, Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 79.

As Ray Anderson rightly diagnosed, some forms of Practical Theology are heir in the West of the Cartesian and Kantian influence that locates certainty in the subjective acts of thought (Descartes) and deny the possibility of knowing objective reality in itself (Kant). Thus, the human subject is the sole determiner of reality, truth, and meaning. In such cases, divine revelation is subordinate to human subjective experience such that "reconciliation thus becomes the dogmatic basis for revelation."[82] All things become true to the extent that they are perceived to be useful and work to achieve the goals of the individual or collective (tribe, people, group); hence, utilitarianism, pragmatism, and emotivism become prevalent.[83] This diagnosis was written in 1979 and is no less accurate today than it was then. In the case of the Indigenous theologies studied here, the self is replaced with a sense of communal and ethnic identity, but the results are the same. We see this exemplified in Woodley's Indigenous theology when he writes, "The truth is in the story, whether it's fact or not fact. I don't know how to answer the question of things like the resurrection. It's been sort of the Western obsession to prove the Bible, ever since the fundamentalist-progressive split. I think it could be an important question [the fact of the resurrection]. I just don't think it's my question, and the reason it's not my personal question is because I have a relationship with Jesus, who is Spirit, and he talks to me, and I talk to him. … I have a relationship in the Spirit with Creator."[84] Further, "the Jesus I have conversations with is what makes sense when I read stories about him. Because that's what I'm feeling in my heart when I'm talking to Jesus."[85] Or consider Vaka'uta's account of what theology should be: it is "worldly, it is rooted in the world, it is shaped by the world, and it should be accountable to the world, and maintain its worldliness because it cannot do without.

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[82] Ray S. Anderson, "A Theology for Ministry," in *Theological Foundations for Ministry: Selected Readings for a Theology of the Church in Ministry,* ed. Ray S. Anderson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 10.

[83] Anderson, "A Theology for Ministry," 10.

[84] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview,* 107.

[85] Woodley, *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, 108.

Theology, and theological education, ceases to be relevant the moment it pretends to be otherworldy."[86]

These types of Practical Theology need to be distinguished from legitimate forms such as Michael Jinkins, who writes, "The value of theology is not determined by how well it reflects the values of a particular age or even the theology's practical and economic application. The value of theology is determined by how faithfully it bears witness to the voice and the character of its subject: God."[87] Despite appeals to a Jesus idea or to faith, the Indigenous theologies surveyed here are as captive to Cartesian dualism as the modern Western Christian theology they think they reject.

At its best, work such as that offered by Havea, Woodley, and Vaka'uta is to be read as pieces of auto-ethnography by those self-consciously working outside the Christian theological tradition. As such, they are helpful forms of qualitative or sociological study of how people observe and experience a form of Christianity. This can be beneficial background context to inform the types of audiences likely to receive the work of theology. It is, however, not strictly speaking, a work of *Christian* theology or even Practical theology properly conceived.

This is not to say that all Practical Theology proceeds in this way. When Practical Theology is theology practically applied, we have a different story. An excellent example of someone who experienced such Indigenous theologies, diagnosed the issue, and responded appropriately is found in the work of Bruce Ritchie. Reflecting on his time as a lecturer in Malawi, Ritchie writes:

> As I became aware of issues arising at the interface between African traditional religion and the Gospel, these very issues prompted me to write my lectures with Torrance and Barth's christologically-centred principles very much in mind. The aim was to try and remove ideas from my own thinking, and from my student's thinking, which were imbued with non-biblical content from our respective cultures. … Each word, each idea, had to be redefined

[86] Vaka'uta, "Margins as Threshold," 18. In the footnote which accompanies the citation, Vaka-uta continues, "And most theologies are otherworldy and abstract," 23.

[87] Michael Jinkins, *Invitation to Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 39.

> from a christological centre. The aim of this discipline was to allow the object of our enquiry—God himself—to dictate the meaning of each word for us. … We did this across the whole range of theological language, concepts, and imaging … And what I found, as I wrote my theology lectures for students who were training to be ministers of the Gospel in an African context, was that this approach crossed so many culture barriers because it helped all of us—teacher and student alike—to root our thinking more fully in Jesus Christ. It was our way of trying to allow the object of our study, namely God as he comes to us in Jesus Christ, attested in Holy Scripture, to remold and to recreate the way we thought.[88]

This Christocentric foundation makes the difference ontologically, epistemologically, and practically.[89]

Indigenous theologies of the kind examined above are not alone in showing the paucity and failure of much of what goes by the name of Practical Theology. Other examples present themselves when a discipline, in this case counselling, seeks to justify its existing practice by appealing to a caricature of a theological idea conducive to the existing aims and ends of the discipline. This is examined in the next section.

2.2 Accounts of Christian Counselling as Practical Theology

Turning from one species of Practical Theology to another, a second example of how Practical Theology is often not, strictly speaking, theological can be found in the work of Christian counsellor Lex McMillan and his attempt to make the doctrine of

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[88] Bruce Ritchie, *T.F. Torrance in Recollection and Reappraisal* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 15.

[89] There are many fine examples of this type of work, including Timothy C. Tennant's *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), especially Chapter Ten, and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017). On the latter, see Myk Habets, "The Global Theology of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen: A Free Church View from Down Under," In *The Dialogic Evangelical Theology of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen: Exploring the Work of God in a Diverse Church and a Pluralistic World*, ed. Amos Yong, Patrick Oden, and Peter Heltzel (Lanham: Fortress Press/Lexington Books, 2022), 121–134.

the Trinity relevant to counselling practice. This example, as above with Indigenous theologies, is drawn from my own geographical context.[90]

In a programmatic essay, McMillan writes, "Counselling is surely prone to uncritically serve dominant cultural stories."[91] He names "individualised conceptions of persons"[92] in psychology as one symptom of this cultural captivity. By this, he presumably means forms of constructivism, but that is not named. He turns to what he calls "social trinitarian thinking,"[93] by which he means what theologians term "social trinitarianism," for a counter resource. He writes, "It is my assessment that unlike some expressions of the Jesus story that are used to legitimize violence instead of wellbeing, social trinitarian thinking is more inclined towards a restorative social project that is ethically shaped by practices such as hospitality to others, offering forgiveness, and working for justice."[94] Here, he shows an *a priori* commitment to a notion of social trinitarianism on the assumption that it leads to better ethical practices and forms of justice than orthodox trinitarianism does, a form of pragmatism where theology is used to support one's presuppositions. As with Havea and Woodley, McMillan, too, lets "reconciliation become the dogmatic basis for revelation,"[95] as Anderson diagnosed earlier. This begs the question of what these better practices are and what justice means in McMillan's context. It also fails to say what is wrong with the trinitarianism(s) he rejects (seemingly classical conceptions of God). Presumably, they have led to poor outcomes, but what these are and why is left unidentified.

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[90] Many other examples could be examined, including Neil Pembroke, *Renewing Pastoral Practice: Trinitarian Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Counselling* (London: Routledge, 2006). In this work, Trinitarian seems to be confused with triadic, and this results in practices such as the necessity of three people in a counselling session (counselor, counselee, and support person)!

[91] Lex McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," in *Stories of Therapy, Stories of Faith*, ed. Lex McMillan, Sarah Penwarden, and Siobhan Hunt (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 4.

[92] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 4.

[93] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 5.

[94] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 5.

[95] Anderson, "A Theology for Ministry," 10.

McMillan's approach, he argues, will be narratival in shape, and as such, "large stories—such as the Jesus one—are capable of providing answers to questions about life on the basis of meaningfulness, rather than on the basis of facts and truthfulness."[96] This belies a commitment to some form of constructivism —what he calls *meaningfulness*—over any form of reality, such as Critical Realism. Here, truth is constructed, not discovered. He says that while he thinks the Jesus story—or his interpretation of it—is true, its truthfulness is unimportant. Meaning making and creating experiences are what count.[97] That, it seems, is an example of the sort of cultural captivity McMillan began rejecting. It is also consistent with the approaches of Havea and Woodley, examined earlier. Narrative is appealed to as the primary vehicle for meaning, and facts or truth are irrelevant to the meaning-making individuals (McMillan), or communities (Havea and Woodley) bring to it.

When defining social trinitarianism, McMillan elides persons divine and human, and in that move, either confuses them or assumes they are the same. The latter option is more likely, given his social trinitarian bias. However, assuming divine Persons are identical to human persons is a fundamental error. McMillan seems to think that divine Persons are individuals characterized by their close relationship with the other two divine Persons (individuals in McMillan's account). But that would arguably be a form of tri-theism—the persistent critique of all forms of social trinitarianism—whereby three beings (three gods) unite to make one community and 'act' as one god. That is not classical Christianity; that is polytheism.[98] Once again, the similarities between McMillan, Havea, and Woodley are apparent. When God's self-revelation is not the basis of one's theology but is replaced with nature, the earth, human reason, or experience, then the doctrine of

[96] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 6.

[97] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 6.

[98] There are many critiques of social trinitarianism, among them see: Sarah Coackley, "'Persons' in the 'Social' Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 123–44; Brian Leftow, " Anti Social Trinitarianism," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203–49; Karen Kilby, " Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," *New Blackfriars* 81 (2000): 432–45; and Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021).

the Trinity is reconceived along polytheist or pantheist lines. Social trinitarianism is simply a palatable Western cultural linguistic way to speak about a god in ways which approximate Christian discourse.

Why this move? First, it matches postmodern epistemology. The epistemology is not named but appears to be constructivism, and so, from initially rejecting constructivism, McMillan is now affirming it.[99] Second, equating divine Persons with human persons offers a way to account meaningfully for human ethical action in relational ways.[100] Or so it is argued. Once more, with McMillan, we see consistent themes across forms of Practical Theology, the drive to make context or culture the determinative principle and for God and Christianity to fit into this. Noting this mistake in some practical theologies, Ray Anderson argued, "Christ's ministry is to the Father for the sake of the world, not to the world for the sake of the Father. This means that the world does not set the agenda for ministry, but the Father, who loves the world and seeks its good, sets this agenda."[101]

In his definition of social trinitarianism, McMillan falls into the unfortunate position of perpetuating a debunked and groundless theory that the West starts with the oneness of God and the East starts with the threeness of God, and herein lies the roots of different doctrines of the Trinity.[102] Karl Barth supposedly brought the two back together in a creative, relational synthesis. McMillan appeals to Thomas F. Torrance at this point.[103] However, turning to Torrance's work, we find no such argument. Instead, we find Torrance saying, "It would be a serious mistake, however, to interpret what is meant by 'Person' in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity by reference to any general, and subsequent notion of person, and not by reference to its aboriginal theological sense."[104] Further, "Applied to God, 'Person' must be

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[99] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 7.

[100] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 8.

[101] Anderson, "A Theology for Ministry," 8.

[102] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 7. See Thomas H. McCall, *Which trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

[103] Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 159–60.

[104] Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 160.

understood in an utterly unique way appropriate to his eternal uncreated and creative Nature, but it may also be applied to human 'persons' made in the image of God in a very different creaturely way."[105] McMillan and Torrance are arguing for diametrically opposed things. The rest of McMillan's argument is premised on this misreading of history and perpetuates the East vs West, one vs three fallacy.[106]

McMillan then adopts the language of *perichoresis* to clarify what social trinitarianism is.[107] Unfortunately, he wrongly uses the theology of Torrance to do this, as Torrance was *not* a social trinitarian.[108] After giving the most basic definition of *perichoresis* (mutual co-indwelling), he then seamlessly moves to the well-trod path of saying this is like a dance and citing, again, Torrance.[109] But nowhere on the page cited by McMillan, or any other, does Torrance use the dance analogy.[110] McMillan then makes the astounding claim that "Trinitarian thinkers mean by this that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three relations who *are* persons, rather than three persons who *have* relations; in other words relation is the primary ontology."[111] But this appears to misunderstand what Aquinas meant by *relation*. One of the few who argue for McMillan's idea is Paul Fiddes,[112] *not* Torrance.[113] This fundamentally misunderstands what the tradition means by person (*hypostasis)*

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[105] Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 160.

[106] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 7–8.

[107] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 8.

[108] Amongst the vast literature on Torrance's trinitarianism, see Paul D. Molnar, *Thomas F. Torrance: Theologian of the Trinity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

[109] Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 102.

[110] The idea of the divine dance was first coined by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* (part 4—Beyond Personality). The image was not based on etymology. However, the subsequent history of the analogy of the *perichoretic* dance saw theologians attempt to establish *perichoresis* on the basis of etymology (*choreo* [chorus] in place of *chorein* ["to contain," "to make room," "to go forward"]).

[111] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 8–9.

[112] Paul Fiddes, *Participating in God, The Creative Suffering of God*

[113] One can see the clear differences between the Trinitarian theology of Torrance and the unorthodox tritheism of Fiddes in the exchange between Paul Molnar (who follows Torrance) and Paul Fiddes in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity,* ed. Jason S. Sexton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

and what Torrance, in this instance, means by onto-relations. By onto-relations (or *perichoresis, coinherence*) Torrance has in mind a "concept of the divine Persons, or an understanding of the three divine Persons in the one God in which the ontic relations between them belong to what they essentially are in themselves in their distinctive *hypostases.*"[114] That is very different from saying relations are prior and ontological and persons are posterior and functional. Torrance's argument, with the Church Fathers, is that God is personal—*not* that God is a network of relations that result in persons. If McMillan is correct, we should pray not to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but to fatherhood, sonship, and spiration! That is hardly a relational gain.

Another misstep McMillan takes relates to his acceptance of the theological program of Catherine LaCugna[115] (I assume he is following her argument, given the liberal citations of her work) in arguing exclusively on the basis of the economy and, in that move, effectively arguing against any ontological Trinity at all. More specifically, he uses the incarnate Christ as the basis for his immanent trinitarianism without realizing that one cannot simply take up into the immanent Trinity the entire economic works of God. If we could, then we would take suffering, limitation, vulnerability, and other creaturely features (fatigue, moods, physicality, temporality) into the Godhead. McMillan does this in his arguments for social trinitarianism by not theologically distinguishing between the incarnate Son and the eternal Son.[116] The critique of LaCugna on this point is well-known; McMillan's theology would call for the same response.[117]

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[114] Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 102.

[115] See Catherin M. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). For a representative critique of her trinitarianism that "the doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about 'God' but a teaching about *God's life with us and our life with each other*," *God for Us,* 228 (emphasis in original), see Paul D. Molnar. *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity,* 2nd edn. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), especially 8–13.

[116] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 9.

[117] See the critique in Paul D. Molnar, *Freedom, Necessity, and the Knowledge of God: In Conversation with Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance* (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 226–7; 235–8; 241–8; 252–5, and in *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity,* Chapters One and Six.

McMillan's discussion of "Differentiated Persons" includes some odd moves.[118] The triunity of God is assumed to be the same as human relationships (and vice-versa). The Nicene Creed is apparently read through this lens, such that when it speaks of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are meant to read into that human relationships and think of three cooperating individuals whose personality is enhanced and developed by that interaction. All this is termed, ambiguously, "neo-orthodox theology," despite never saying what or why this is the case.

There is much in the latter half of the essay that is helpful. However, it is misleading theologically and as such, creates a false doctrine of God, and the practical results are actually *less* relational and likely to result in *less* human flourishing than if orthodox trinitarianism were applied to counselling and other social activity.[119] It would be ideal if McMillan's social trinitarianism could give way to an orthodox relational ontology that can be worked out in social relations and contexts consistent across theology and education, not to mention counselling. As Torrance said, "this onto-relational concept of 'person,' generated through the doctrines of Christ and the Holy Trinity, is one that is also applicable to inter-human relations, but in a created way reflecting the uncreated way in which it applies to the Trinitarian relations in God."[120] Ray Anderson also argues that a "Christological, and actually Trinitarian, basis for ministry rules out both utilitarianism, which tends to create ministry out of need, and pragmatism, which transforms ministry into a marketing strategy."[121]

What is striking in these various examples of Practical Theology, selective as they are, is their similarity to the Western post-modern self, most typically represented by the idea of expressive individualism. In the case of Indigenous theologies, this is simply expressive *communitarianism* or expressive ethnicity. According to expressive individualism, a term coined by Robert Bellah, the path to

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[118] McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," 9.

[119] An orthodox and counter-example is that offered by Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger who brings Karl Barth's theology to bear upon the task of counselling in, *Theology and Pastoral Counselling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

[120] Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 103.

[121] Anderson, "A Theology for Ministry," 8–9.

authenticity prioritises inner feelings over any adherence to transcendent truth or objective reality.[122] This is simply a truism for much contemporary counselling theory, the turn to the therapeutic in the quest to aid people to be true to their inner selves, which is, we may note, another form of Gnosticism. It is no less true of Indigenous theologies, albeit this is expressed in ethnic and communitarian ways. In expressive individualism, the individual is correct; in expressive communitarianism, the ethnic culture is right. For the former, emotions rule supreme; for the latter, culture is king.[123]

The point of the critique of certain forms of Practical Theology offered here is not to discredit all of what goes on in the sub-disciplines of Practical Theology but, rather, to make the point that when Practical Theology stops being theological, it stops being practical, and conversely, dogmatics is not the impractical alternative to Practical Theology.

The critique of Indigenous theologies and counselling should not be taken as a critique of Indigenous/contextual theology as a whole or the relevance of theology to counselling, either. The argument is that when theology is rigorously applied, it will result in better contextualization and better practical outcomes. There is no more relational theology suitable for counselling than a proper doctrine of the Trinity and the hypostatic union, for example. The argument is also not being made here that theology is created in a vacuum and should look the same in all times and places. That would be a facile claim. Cultures and ethnicities add to our understanding of the world and enrich our lives together. Indigenous ways of knowing offer insights into the world that we are the poorer for if we ignore them. Contextualizing the faith is essential in every time and place. But as Jude 1:3 rightly says, we "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people." This is not to imply that context (cultural or other) determines the truth of

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[122] See Robert N. Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1996), 333–34.

[123] Holding Carl R. Trueman's work *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022) in one hand, and the works of Havea, Woodley, and McMillan in the other hand, proves fascinating, as the correlation between the two is palpable.

one's theology; it doesn't. It is not the content but the object of faith that determines the truth of theology.

3. Scientific Theology

What is the alternative to the examples of Practical Theology discussed here? In short, to see how dogmatics is also practical. Once again, by appeal to Anderson, the alternative to forms of Practical Theology examined above is that we are required to "set forth the nature of revelation and reconciliation as God's giving of himself to us in Jesus Christ. As such, our task will be what Karl Barth calls 'scientific theology.' It will require us to allow the nature of reality, as it discloses itself to us, to determine our method of knowing that reality. It will necessitate our viewing the object of knowledge as free to disclose itself to us on its own terms."[124] The scientific theology Anderson appealed to was drawn from Barth's initial impetus but mainly from the work of Torrance.

Torrance's dogmatics is characterized by a movement both up and down the three main domains of reality: Experiential, Actual, and Real. As Habets explained:

> Torrance is clear that objective reality, which in this case is God in God's self-givenness, has ontological priority over all of our human referencing. Theological thinking, as with all scientific thinking, must be properly realist. It is out of this "theological realism" that Torrance sees the doctrine of the *homoousion* as a faithful expression and disclosure model of the oneness in being in the relation of the incarnate Son with the Father. Ultimately, Torrance's theological realism is grounded in God and calls the church back to a truly rational worship of God (*logike latreia*). This point was made clear in an essay on theological realism in which Torrance wrote: "It is as our communion with God the Father through Christ and in the Spirit is founded in and shares in the inner Trinitarian consubstantial or *homoousial* communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that the subjectively-given pole of conceptuality is constantly purified and refined under the searching light and

[124] Ray S. Anderson, "A Theology for Ministry," in *Theological Foundations for Ministry: Selected Readings for a Theology of the Church in Ministry,* ed. Ray S. Anderson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 10.

> quickening power of the objectively given pole in divine revelation. Within that polarity Christian theology becomes what it essentially is and ought always to be, *logike latreia*, rational worship of God."[125]

With the definition of dogmatics offered earlier, allied to the methodology of Critical Realism, it is clear that Torrance's dogmatics is not speculative, esoteric, or impractical. The real difficulty for some Practical Theologians reading Torrance's work, as but one exemplar of dogmatics, is their acceptance of either social constructivism or logical positivism as the prevailing paradigm and a consequent refusal to move beyond the domain of Experience to the higher explanatory domains of knowledge: the Actual and the Real. Torrance, on the other hand, does not spend much time at the level of the Experiential (something we may be critical of),[126] instead preferring to focus on the levels of the Actual and the Real.

Because Torrance is working primarily with theological concepts and he is typically working with a doctrine of the Trinity, he refers to the domain of the Experiential as the *doxological* or *evangelical level* where worship of the Father, Son, and Spirit is conducted; the domain of the Actual he refers to as the *theological level* where the doctrine of the economic Trinity is developed; and the domain of the Real he refers to as the *higher theological level* and it is here that developed doctrines of the tri-unity of God emerge. The doctrine of the *homoousion* is dominant at the second level, and the doctrine of *perichoresis* is dominant at the third level. But then, importantly, *perichoresis* is applied back down to the Actual or

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[125] Habets, *Theology in Transposition,* 59, citing Thomas F. Torrance, "Theological Realism," in *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology: Essays Presented to D. M. MacKinnon,* ed. B. Hebblethwaite and S. Sutherland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 193.

[126] For a partial critique of Torrance at this point see Myk Habets, "You Wonder Where the Pneumatology Went? Thomas F. Torrance and Third Article Theology," *Participatio: Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* 10 (2022): 33–55.

theological level, and then it is experienced more deeply at the Experiential or doxological level.[127]

Systematic theology, or dogmatics as it is also known, is a practical discipline if by practical one means it is a useful discipline that informs the practices of believers. In the preface to their work on sanctification, Kent Eilers and Kyle Strobel, two scholars who model Practical Theology, write, "dogmatics is a theological discipline both conceptual and practical. Conceptual in the sense that it concerns itself with the 'scope, unity, and coherence' of Christian teaching, and practical in the sense that it is likewise concerned with the flourishing of Christian faithfulness."[128] They further elaborate, "Christian dogmatics of this sort proceeds under the assumption that the practice of everyday life is, in fact, intimately and inescapably theological, and the cheerful work of dogmatics can and should participate in the sanctification of the Holy Spirit who forms Christians in the likeness of Christ."[129]

In a similar vein, the popular introductory textbook on theology by Beth Felker Jones is deliberately entitled *Practicing Christian Doctrine.*[130] Jones is clear that "doctrine and discipleship always go together."[131] She continues, "to practice Christian doctrine is to yearn for a deeper understanding of the Christian faith, to seek the logic and beauty of that faith, and to live out what we have learned in the daily realities of the Christian life."[132] The examples could be amplified many times

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[127] On Torrance's use of levels of theologising, see Habets, *Theology in Transposition*, 32–39. For Roy Bhaskar's seminal treatment of these domains, see his *A Realist Theory of Science* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008). A good example of the experiential impact of Torrance's work can be seen in the work of his brother, James. B. Torrance, in *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996). Torrance's most practical or applied work is found in his sermons, see Myk Habets, "*Theologia* is *Eusebia*: Torrance's Church Homiletics," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance,* ed. Myk Habets and Paul Molnar (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), 259–76.

[128] Kent Eilers and Kyle C. Strobel, "Preface," in *Sanctified by Grace: A Theology of the Christian Life*, ed. Kent Eilers and Kyle C. Strobel (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), ix.

[129] Eilers and Kyle C. Strobel, "Preface," ix–x.

[130] Jones, *Practicing Chrisitan Doctrine*.

[131] Jones, *Practicing Chrisitan Doctrine,* 4.

[132] Jones, *Practicing Chrisitan Doctrine*, 2.

over. It is not theologians who have set up dogmatics to be unrelated to life; instead, it seems, certain Practical Theologians (with obvious exceptions) have been reluctant, on the whole, to take the 'theology' part of their titular roles seriously as they perhaps should.

4. The Critical Task of Pastoral Leadership

As well as being a leading theologian, Torrance was a churchman his entire life, with an impressive resume of roles, responsibilities, and achievements. Torrance was an ordained minister of the Kirk of Scotland, serving two congregations for ten years (1940–43, 45–50) before taking up academic positions at the University of Edinburgh. In 1976–77, Torrance served as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Torrance was also consecrated as a Presbyter of the Greek Orthodox Church and given the honorary title of Protopresbyter in 1973. Torrance was immersed in ecclesiastical politics and wider ecumenical and church-related concerns for much of his career. Throughout the 1950s–60s, Torrance was especially active in church-related work. Through the 1950s, he provided extensive resources for the Church of Scotland on various church reforms, from ordination to ecumenism.[133] Torrance was variously the Convenor of the Church of Scotland Commission on Baptism (1954–62),[134] participated in the dialogue between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland (1955–58), served on the Faith and Order Commission (1952–62), and was active with the World Council of Churches.[135] Later, Torrance was active in the dialogue between the Reformed Churches and a pan-alliance of Orthodox Churches, which met in 1981, 1983, 1988,

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[133] Much of this work has been included in the two volumes of collected papers Thomas F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church,* 2 vols (London: Lutterworth, 1959/Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996).

[134] Torrance issued five interim reports (1955–59) along with the final report in 1960.

[135] Some of the fruit of this work can be seen in Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Towards Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), and *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

and 1990. This resulted in an agreed-upon statement on the Trinity in 1991.[136] In 1959, he published *The School of Faith*, an anthology of Reformed catechisms with a lengthy essay-long introduction.[137] These accomplishments are mentioned to merely show the credentials of Torrance for speaking into practical theology. In 1955, Torrance published *Royal Priesthood*, a lengthy exposition of a theology of ordained ministry and this will be the focus of what follows, a work John Webster described as "a minor classic of post-war ecumenical theology."[138] In *Royal Priesthood,* Torrance articulates a theologically informed vision of pastoral leadership.[139]

In *Royal Priesthood,* we see themes redolent in Torrance's oeuvre, most notably the double character of Christ's priestly work, a central tenet in pro-Chalcedonian Christology and hence in any orthodox treatment of Christ. By double character is meant the two-fold movement of Christ from God to humanity and from humanity to God. Christ is both the fullness of Deity in bodily form and, hence, the living Word of God to humanity, and he is at the same time the exclusive expression of humanity back to God; he is our sole mediator between humanity and God.

We see this emphasized time and time again as Torrance makes clear that in the one person of Christ, the mediation of God's Word and the priestly witness to

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[136] See the collected papers and the Agreed Statement, largely written by Torrance, in Thomas F. Torrance, ed, *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches* vol 1 and 2 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985, 1993).

[137] *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church,* trans and ed. Thomas F. Torrance (London: James Clarke and Co, 1959).

[138] John Webster, "Thomas Forsyth Torrance 1913-2007," *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy,* XIII (London: The British Academy, 2014), 425.

[139] Many other works of Torrance could also be used to illustrate the practical nature of his dogmatics. One thinks of his influential essay on "The Mind of Christ in Worship: The Problem of Apollinarianism in the Liturgy," in *Theology in Reconciliation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 139–214, wherein Torrance clearly demonstrates how and with what implications practical theology of worship must connect our humanity with Christ's human actions of obedience in reconciling us to God. Undercutting this relation in an Apollinarian fashion "disqualifies Christ from being a priest joined to us by fellow-feeling for our infirmities, and so cuts away the ground from his mediatorial activity on behalf of and from man towards the Father" (ibid., 148).

God's will are both found perfectly in Christ. In short, Christ is God's fullness in bodily form and humanity's exclusive response to God. A few examples of Torrance's emphasis on this two-fold mediation will suffice. In the Old Testament, these two aspects are brought together in the doctrine of the Suffering Servant; "here the two aspects of the priesthood are brought into one, for the conceptions of Moses and Aaron are telescoped together into the vicarious life of the Servant of the Lord in order to set forth at once the redeeming action of God for Israel, and the sacrifice of obedience enacted into the life of Israel."[140] This forms the climax of the Old Testament and lays the foundation for the coming of the Messiah: "Jesus Christ comprised in Himself both God's saving action towards man, and man's perfect obedience toward God (John 5.17–47)."[141] Torrance emphasizes the significance of this, namely, "He is at once the Word of God to man and for the first time a real word of man to God;"[142] before elaborating, "the significant fact is that while in Word Jesus exercises His prophetic ministry, in His action He exercises His priestly ministry."[143] In now-familiar Barthian language, Torrance affirms that Christ "is at once Victim and Priest, at once the Judged and the Intercessor;"[144] and "in that unity of the divine-human steadfastness the Word of God is spoken, the Word of Truth and Grace is enacted in our existence of flesh and blood, and the answer of man is given in the obedience of a perfect life, in the prayer which is the whole assent of Jesus to the will of God as it confronts the will of man: 'Not my will but thine be done'."[145] On the basis of the two-fold work of Christ, the rest of humanity finds its true response to God in confession, repentance, and faith, "that confession is the one thing we hold on to. It is the confession of our hope, for all our hope rests on the obedience of Christ on the Cross and His confession before the Father."[146]

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[140] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 6.

[141] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 7.

[142] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 8.

[143] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 9.

[144] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 9.

[145] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 12–13.

[146] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 13.

The ultimate significance of the two-fold meditation of Christ for human experience is that the objective and ontological basis of the work of Christ is the subjective and functional ground of our human response, "the reconciliation wrought by Christ has been completed once and for all and by its very nature cannot be repeated, but it is given a counterpart in the Church in the form of Eucharistic prayer and praise."[147] Three significant facts attend the two-fold mediation of Christ as Priest, what Torrance properly refers to as the "Royal Priesthood": first, Jesus himself fulfills both aspects of priesthood—God to humanity and humanity to God—in himself as incarnate Son; second, both parts of his priesthood are fulfilled *for us* in his radical act of substitutionary atonement; and third, Christ continues to act as our High Priest and mediator in his ascension and session.[148] On this basis, Christ continues to be "not only our word to God but God's Word to us."[149] It is on the basis of the two-fold work of Christ—the Word of God to humanity and the response of humanity to God—that Torrance builds his theology of the vicarious work of Christ. The notion of Christ's vicarious work is a core distinctive in Torrance's theology and it undergirds his theology of church and ministry. Before focusing on pastoral leadership, we have to consider briefly the function of the Church in Torrance's theology.[150]

It is significant for Torrance that Christ sent the Holy Spirit after his ascension to actualise the work of Christ in redemption. Three things stand out for Torrance in this regard:[151] first, the Spirit creates a body for Christ within which the work of Christ can be realized in the world; second, the Church is the sphere within which God will perfect the world and all that is in it; and finally, this movement of redemption and perfection takes place through the operation of Word and

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[147] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 13.

[148] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 14-15.

[149] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 15.

[150] Torrance develops the theology of Christ's High Priesthood and mediatory role in many other works, notably in *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1998), where he elaborates, at length, on the significance of Christ's ascension around the seminal theme that "in the incarnation we have the meeting of man and God in man's place, but in the ascension we have the meeting of man and God in God's place" (ibid., 129).

[151] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 23-24.

Sacraments. Torrance develops these themes in line with the consistent Reformed emphasis on the inseparability of Word and Spirit. In his ascension, the incarnate Son sends the Spirit to perfect the Church and empower its mission in the world; as such, "the being and mission of the Church are inseparable."[152] What is the mission of the Church? Precisely that of Christ, because "He is pleased to use the Church as His Body and to use it in His ministry of reconciliation, we must think of the ministry of the Church as correlative to the ministry of Christ."[153] Thus, the Church participates in Christ's ministry, and as such, its primary task is to witness to his royal priesthood. The Church has no other ministry than the ministry of Christ, but we do not take the place of Christ, extend Christ, or repeat Christ. Instead, "the Church that is baptized with Christ's Baptism and drinks His Cup engages in His ministry in a way appropriate to the redeemed and appropriate to the Body. Christ exercises His ministry in a way appropriate to the Redeemer and appropriate to the Head of the Body."[154] Once again, this is why the concept of participation is so foundational in Torrance's theology. The presence of the Holy Spirit enables the church to participate in the ministry of Christ without taking over from Christ or replacing Christ with human agents.[155] It is also worth noting that participation is a category of action that requires human agency, effort, and response. Participation is a *practical* category if ever there was one.

Torrance draws two fundamental principles from the fact that the Church only has a ministry as it participates in the one ministry of Christ. First, the Church is fundamentally a "reflex" of Christ's descent and ascent, his *katabasis* and *anabasis*, his Word of God to humanity and the response of humanity to God.[156] The order is important for Torrance and the Church ministers in that order of descent and ascent, of humiliation before exaltation. The alternative is deadly as it involves "a

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[152] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 28.

[153] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 35.

[154] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 37.

[155] Torrance sees Roman Catholicism doing just this, replacing Christ with human priests in such a way that the Church is not the locus of ministry (individuals are) on the one hand, and on the other hand, displacing Christ himself. See Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 37.

[156] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 38–39.

doctrine of the ministry as Pelagian movement grounded upon an Adoptionist Christology and upon a heathen notion of atonement as act of man upon God, involving a correspondingly heathen notion of Eucharistic Sacrifice."[157] Second, the ministry of the Church is not to represent the Church to God, as it is not built from the ground up but, instead, from the top (descent) down. Ministry in the Church is not on behalf of Christ, as if ministers represent Christ, for the simple fact that all members of the body are ministers and all participate in Christ, as the body metaphor clearly indicates. Only within the corporate and communal basis of the Church as the body of Christ are we to think of a special qualification for the priesthood, the ordained ministry of the pastoral leader, minister, or priest. "The real priesthood is that of the whole Body, but within that Body there takes place a membering of the corporate priesthood, for the edification of the whole Body, to serve the whole Body."[158] The priesthood is all the members of the Body of Christ but also, specifically, those "set apart to minister to the edification of the Body until the Body reaches the fulness of Christ (Eph 4.13)."[159]

"Though the ministry of the Church does not in any sense extend the ministry of Christ," writes Torrance, "and though the priesthood in the Church does not prolong His Priesthood, nevertheless the priesthood in the Church derives its form from the form of the Suffering Servant, and so the ministry of the Church goes back to the historical Jesus, not to extend His vicarious functions but to follow Him as disciples."[160] In an extended citation, we read that God's vision for the Church is given in its high calling of participating in Christ's royal priesthood.

> *Only* as the Church lets itself be implicated in Christ's death and in His reproach, can it minister in His ministry. *Only* as it learns to let the mind of Christ be its mind, and is inwardly and outwardly shaped by His servant-obedience unto the death of the Cross, can it participate in His Prophetic, Priestly, and Kingly Ministry. … It must be prepared to be so conformed to

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[157] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 39–40.

[158] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 81.

[159] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 81.

[160] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 84-85. Later in the same work (95–96), Torrance speaks of the Church's ministry as an "echo" of the Incarnation.

> Him whose visage was marred more than any man's (Isa. 52.14; 53.2f). … It is when the Church is ready to be made of no reputation that it is ready to participate in Christ's own ministry. This is a ministry that is to be exercised only in the weakness of God which is stronger than men (1 Cor. 1.17-31).[161]

Whilst only a précis of Torrance's theology of Church and ordained ministry, we already see him moving through the three domains of reality when he starts with the church's worship (Experience), moves to the orders and priesthood of the Church (Actual), before investigating the higher reality of the hypostatic identity of the eternal Son now Son of Man and his vicarious ministry (Real). Torrance then applies these insights and theology gained from the Real domain of knowledge back to Actual events and then down into lived Experience. And why did Torrance dedicate so much time to this particular issue of ordained and corporate priesthood? Because he wanted to work towards the unity of the Church, specifically the unification of the Kirk of Scotland (Presbyterian) and the Church of England (Anglican). It is important to note, however, that this union is on the basis of the will of God and not derived from culture, experience, or even tradition. Torrance concludes his study with these words, "Certainly the time has come for a proper reunion of the churches on a Biblical and doctrinal basis and in a plenitude of faith and order in which no church will be the poorer but in which all churches will be enriched."[162] In his theology, we see both the practicality of theology and the use of other disciplines, such as critical realism from the philosophy of science, cohere around a trinitarian theology of divine self-revelation, exemplifying both dogmatics and interdisciplinary scholarship. More can be said about Torrance's theology of ministry, but this is merely offered to illustrate the larger point: theology is not

[161] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 87 (emphasis added).

[162] Torrance, *Royal Priesthood,* 108.

impractical, and interdisciplinary studies in theology must be rigorously theological.[163]

5. Conclusion

All scientific disciplines must be open to critique, which is no less true for theological studies. Various forms of Practical Theology have been surveyed, critiqued, and diagnosed as *a*theological. The discipline of systematic theology has been explained as being concerned not simply with noetic effects or impractical ideas but, instead, a discipline concerned with the entire person. Finally, a brief study of Torrance's theology of ministry was offered to illustrate the practical nature of theology. It is beyond the scope of this essay to map out how Torrance's theology might be applied to indigeneity or to counselling. This work lies ahead of us as an invitation. It is hoped that the fields of Christian dogmatics and Practical Theology might work toward a more theologically rigorous form of interdisciplinary integration.

[163] There are many works that take up Torrance's theology and apply it to pastoral leadership and ministry, including but not limited to: Andrew Purves's two works, *The Crucifixion of Ministry* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007) and *The Resurrection of Ministry* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010); Graham Buxton, *Dancing in the Dark: The Privilege of Participating in God's Ministry in the World,* rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016); Robert J. Stamps, *The Sacrament of the Word Made Flesh: The Eucharistic Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007); and Kate Tyler, *The Ecclesiology of Thomas F. Torrance:* Koinonia *and the Church* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Press, 2019). In addition, there are many more books, essays, and related literature, such as David W. Torrance, *The Reluctant Minster* (St Andrews: The Handsel Press, 2015).