Participatio

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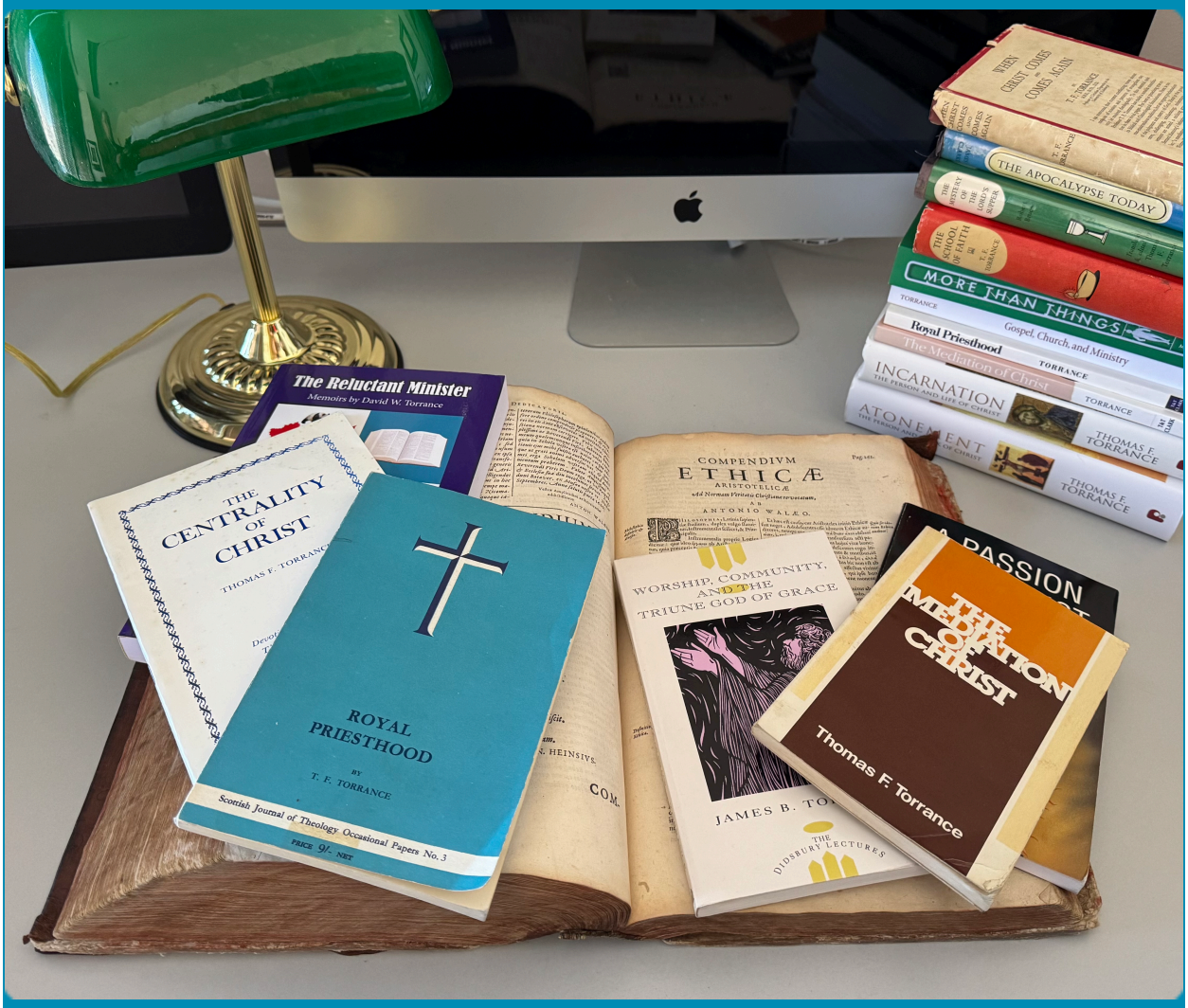
Volume 12 (2024)

"The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance"



Participatio: The Journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship

Participatio is an annual, peer-reviewed, open access journal of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship (tftorrance.org), a research fellowship within the Christian Church and tradition based on the theology of Thomas F. Torrance. The journal's mission is two-fold: to apprehend the significance of Torrance's work and to advance his evangelical and scientific theology for the benefit of the Church, academy, and society.

On the journal website view past and current issues, submission guidelines, calls for papers, interlinked bibliographic records, and additional information including volunteer opportunities for professional service. Researchers interested in engaging the theology of T. F. Torrance are welcome to submit manuscripts and inquiries. Contributions from diverse disciplines and perspectives are encouraged to explore the wide-ranging significance of Torrance's legacy.

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COVER IMAGE: Some practical and pastoral works in the Torrancean tradition from the Thomas F. Torrance Collection, History of Science Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries. See https://tftorrance.org/2022-OU-1 for current holdings and a wanted list. The commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics* is in Antonius Walaeus, *Opera omnia* (Lugduni Batavorum, 1643), copy inscribed by Thomas F. Torrance and donated by Robert T. Walker.

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Contents

PART I. ARTICLES

Part II. Essay Reviews

PART I

ARTICLES

Daniel J. Cameron and Myk Habets, "Editorial," *Participatio* 12: "The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance" (2024), 3-8; #2024-DJC-MH-1. CC-by-nc-sa.

EDITORIAL

Daniel J. Cameron, Ph.D.

(Kings College, University of Aberdeen)

Senior Theology Teacher

Head of Bible Department

Chicago Hope Academy, IL USA

danieljordancameron@gmail.com

Myk Habets, Ph.D.

(Otago University)

Senior Lecturer in Theology

Head of Theology

Laidlaw College, New Zealand

mhabets@laidlaw.ac.nz

At the heart of practical theology is the relationship between theory and practice. In the academy, throughout history, this relationship has been tenuous at best. Ray Anderson argues that the bridge between practical theology and what he calls "pure theology" is one way in which the academic discipline of theology ("pure theology") informs the practical, but the practical does not have anything to offer the academic. He goes on to say that while practical theology was permitted into the university as a necessary application of theory, "practical theologians ordinarily did not carry union cards admitting them to the theological guild."[1] Anderson is right about this historic divide, but thankfully, this has begun to change in recent years. The bifurcation of theory and practice is becoming a thing of the past, and the bridge is becoming a two-way street between the "academic" and the "practical" in which both can and must learn from each other.

The origin of practical theology (*die praktische Theologie*) as a methodological sub-discipline is often attributed to Friedrich Schleiermacher when,

[1] Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 7. Alistair Campbell argues along similar lines that the term 'practical theology' to the "theological outsider must sound remarkably like a contradiction in terms, whilst to the professional theologian it may carry undertones of an unscholarly pragmatism or a tendency towards liberal theology." Campbell, "The Nature of Practical Theology," in *Blackwell Reader in Pastoral Theology,* eds. James Woodward and Steve Pattison (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 78.

in 1811, he published his *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study,* which served at the time as the first reflection on practical theology as a field of inquiry within the university.[2] However, "practical theology" as a description of the theological task is much older than this. In fact, theology applied to practical issues facing the church was one of the main tasks of the theological agenda in the early church. This "inclusive use" of the term practical theology ended with the rise of the Medieval university in the 13th century.[3]

Practical theology found its way back into the university around the 16th century, though not in its present form. Practical theology at this time could be more accurately defined as a type of pastoral theology in which "theoretical" theology was "stripped of all the disputation," leaving a "simplified summary of academic theology" which was given to those students who did not plan on studying academic theology further, what Maddox refers to as "mere pastors."[4] By the seventeenth century, practical theology became an actual discipline within the university with the establishment of, what appears to be, the first chair of Practical Theology sometime around 1776–1777 in Vienna,[5] but the discipline still remained as a form of pastoral theology looking more like the application of Systematic Theology rather than an actual discipline itself. This model of Practical Theology dominated the academy through the 20th century, and it has only been in the last 50 years or so that Practical Theology has been revisited as something more than mere "application." Practical Theology, as a discipline, can be better understood as the extension of systematic theology into the life and practice of the church. It is not merely a cognitive exercise but cognition put into practice. As John Swinton notes, practical theology is "whole person knowledge. Human beings are lovers and worshipers as well as thinkers and all of these aspects are potential sources of

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[2] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, 3rd edition, revised translation of the 1811 and 1830 editions, with essays and notes by Terrence N. Tice. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

[3] Randy L. Maddox, "Practical Theology: A Discipline in Search of a Definition," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18 (1991): 159.

[4] Ibid., 160.

[5] Edward F. Capuchin, "Siblings or 2nd Cousin-once-removed: A relational taxonomy for Practical theology," *New Theology Review* 26:1 (2013): 11–20.

theological knowledge."[6] Practical Theology is not the "practical" counterpart to the "impractical" nature of Systematics. Rather, Practical Theology should be the natural *telos* of Systematics.

An over-simplistic reading of Thomas F. Torrance's work may lend itself towards an interpretation that can easily seem to uphold the above-stated bifurcation of the theoretical from the practical. However, students of Torrance's writings can see his ecclesial and pastoral commitments shining through the complex theological themes of his work. Ray Anderson, an actual student of Torrance at the University of Edinburgh in the 1970s, reflects on his time with Torrance saying that he "came to appreciate even more the deeply devotional, even pietistic, life of faith that lay hidden behind his often-forbidding erudition and the semantic thicket of his writing."[7] This volume of *Participatio* continues this method of theology in such a way that the theoretical and the practical are in proper relation to each other.

The essays constituting this volume of *Participatio* endeavour to interrogate aspects of Thomas F. Torrance's theology — systematic and practical — and apply them to issues facing Christians today. The six contributors clearly find the theology of the vicarious humanity of Christ as a fecund idea, able to be applied to a range of church and social issues facing Christians around the world. It is perhaps this idea, the vicarious humanity and ministry of Christ, that is Torrance's enduring legacy to practical theology, and each of the contributors offers compelling pastoral and practical theology as ways of applying the idea.

In the first essay, Korean theologian Hakbong Kim explores the vicarious humanity of Christ as it relates to the sacramental action of the church and develops a form of social ethic applicable to the church today. Kim rightly understands how to read the work of Torrance in order to see how it is not simply theological or esoteric, as John Webster, for one, once argued. Instead, Kim shows how Torrance's Trinitarian and Christocentric theology is the ground and grammar of applied theology and in the process, offers an implicit critique of practical theologies

[6] John Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom: Towards a Practical Theology of Human Nature, Interpersonal Relationships, and Mental Health Care* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 11.

[7] Ray S. Anderson, "The Practical Theology of T.F. Torrance," *Participatio* 1 (2009): 50.

that are neither theological nor practical. As Kim writes, "for Torrance, the church's participation in Christ through the Spirit becomes a means of grace to fulfill its mission, that is, a communion of reconciliation amidst a distorted and divisive society. This reflects Torrance's theological approach to the particular social ethics of the church." The church would do well to heed these words afresh.

The second essay, by Indian theologian Stavan John, is a trenchant clarion call to acknowledge the reality of the ongoing humanity of Christ in his ascension. Here, the vicarious humanity of Christ is tethered, if we can speak that way, to the actual Christ, risen, ascended, glorified, and seated at the right hand of the Father in glory from which he reigns and will come again. John reminds us that Christ is alive and well, human and embodied, our great High Priest and mediator of our humanity even in the heavens. John writes, "The salvific import of the doctrine of the ascension in Torrance's thought is a generative insight that can dialogue with proposals in mission theology that are calling for a paradigm shift from a cross-centered theology to one that is centered on the ascension, especially with respect to missions and evangelism." In the often-overlooked doctrine of the ascension, we find a foundation for Christocentric ministry today that far outstrips the rather facile appeal by many today to 'incarnational ministry,' as if we could do ministry and mission today simply in imitation of Christ and not in full participation.

The third essay, by emerging American scholar-pastor Chancellor Stillwell, offers an insightful and profound reflection on the vicarious humanity of Christ as it applies to the event of preaching. Torrance's preaching and theology of preaching have come in for scant attention, but with this essay, Stillwell changes the game. No less Trinitarian or Christocentric than recent Reformed accounts of preaching, Stillwell finds in Torrance's theology a way beyond the often-glib accounts of Christocentric preaching, and in its place, he finds a way for the preacher to find ways to appeal to the Gospel and to offer an invitation to respond, in ways which don't push people back upon themselves for their salvation. In similar ways to Torrance's preaching, Stillwell appeals to the faith of Christ as our only sure means of salvation. This is Reformed and evangelical homiletics at its best.

Paul Metzger's essay is the fourth in the volume. A well-known American theologian, Metzger seamlessly blends the theology of Torrance with his own very

personal account of living amidst trial and tragedy in order to offer a Christocentric theology for pastoral and palliative care. This is not an easy read emotionally, but it is a profoundly moving insight into just how theology is practical when it is understood and applied rightly. As Metzger writes, "The article highlights the tangible theological significance of Torrance's in-depth pastoral theological offerings, as the author provides holistic care for his minimally conscious adult son who endured a catastrophic brain injury. The same model can prove promising for pastors and chaplains operating in other critical care settings." We need this kind of chaperone for theologically informed pastoral care, and Metzger is a sure guide for others to follow.

Continuing the application of Torrance's theology, especially the vicarious humanity and ministry of Christ, to the practical and pastoral issues of today, the fifth essay in the volume by Australian academic Jenny Richards, a law lecturer by trade, offers a hard-hitting and timely exploration of how the work of T. F. and James Torrance can resource the difficult issue of how to respond to women experiencing domestic and family abuse. Unfortunately, domestic abuse is not simply a social issue; it is also a church issue, as Richards points out, and providing a resource for pastors on how to respond to domestic and family violence is important as this is an issue of justice. Richards writes, "Beyond informing pastoral church responses, this work can conceptualize justice in a way that holds its theological and legal meanings together and reframes understandings of and responses to the impacts of violence." T. F. and J. B. Torrance were tireless defenders of godly justice, and this work by Richards, a legal specialist and one who has written on the difference between a covenant and a contract, is a welcome resource from someone qualified to speak on this difficult topic

The final essay in the volume is by Orthodox scholar Emmanuel Gergis and furthers the important work on ecumenism that T. F. Torrance was so committed to. Gergis focuses on the Coptic Church tradition in order to see the connections between this tradition and the theology of Torrance, finding many comparisons and touch-points between them, not the least of which is Torrance's unitary approach to theology. Gergis writes, "Torrance's theological synthesis invites a deeper, more inclusive ecumenical dialogue between Christian traditions, especially fostering an

ecumenical bridge between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches, underscoring the significance of the miaphysite understanding of Christology, in which Christ's divine and human natures are united in one reality without confusion, separation, or change." Any move toward further ecumenism is one to be celebrated.

Hakbong Kim, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Sacramental Action of the Church: The Promise of Social Ethics in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance," *Participatio* 12: "The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance" (2024), 9-27; #2024-HK2-1. CC-by-nc-sa.

THE VICARIOUS HUMANITY OF CHRIST AND THE SACRAMENTAL ACTION OF THE CHURCH:

The Promise of Social Ethics in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance

Hakbong Kim, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, Asian Center for Theology Studies and Mission (ACTS University), South Korea

jake.hakbong.kim@acts.ac.kr

Abstract: *Thomas F. Torrance's thought on social ethics is not developed as an independent area of theology but is alluded to in his trinitarian theology and Christology. The concept of the vicarious humanity of Christ is key to our understanding of how Torrance derives social ethics from trinitarian theology and Christology. Just as for Torrance, Christ's vicarious humanity is the creative source of not only redemption but also personalization, which enables us to have personal relations with God and other humans and sincerely follow moral obligations and order in society; it is of both soteriological and practical significance. Moreover, since the personalizing person of Christ is present and his personalizing work is continuous in the church and its sacramental action, for Torrance, the church's participation in Christ through the Spirit becomes a means of grace to fulfill its mission, that is, a communion of reconciliation amidst a distorted and divisive society. This reflects Torrance's theological approach to the particular social ethics of the church.*

1. Introduction

In the theology of Thomas F. Torrance, the discussion of theological ethics or practice primarily emerges in his trinitarian theology and Christology. For example, the concept of the vicarious humanity of Christ is critical to understanding Torrance's thought on how the sinful and divisive personality is subjected to reconciliation with God in and through Christ, thereby being personalized and humanized. Just as our union with Christ through the Spirit is not only the atoning and reconciling union but also the personalizing union that engenders a transformation from "what we are" to "what we ought to be" in relationship with God and other fellow humans, for Torrance the vicarious humanity of Christ is of both soteriological and practical significance.

Torrance understands that the church is the very locus in which Christ's vicarious humanity continues to work and embodies his personalizing activity on earth. When the church is renewed as a community of reconciliation, people are drawn into the fellowship of those who are reconciled with God, then one another, and ultimately into union with Christ. In this way, the human hostilities and divisions caused by sin in our social and cultural existence are continually healed and reshaped. Importantly, Torrance's social vision through the church does not emphasize the church's social and political action *per se* to overcome societal divisions, but instead Christ's ongoing reconciling and transforming work in and through the church, the body of Christ. This kind of approach to social transformation by the church highlights how Torrance relates Christ's personalizing person and work to the promise of true and personal social relations and structures, an approach different from "exemplarism" that detaches Christ from his work.

Based on the above understanding, this essay will first deal with Torrance's concept of the vicarious humanity of Christ, considering its ethical and social implications. It will then explore Torrance's understanding of the sacramental action of the church, that is, Baptism and the Eucharist in relation to Christ's ongoing reconciling and personalizing work. Through this, the essay will demonstrate that the church's sacramental participation in Christ is a means of grace to create the church's own particular social ethics. Finally, Torrance's thought on social ethics will be compared to "exemplarism" to evaluate the theological practicality based on the

concept of Christ's vicarious humanity. Through this investigation, the essay will argue that despite their positive relational and social implications, the theological attempts of exemplarism that directly use the sacraments and the trinitarian communion for Christian social practice fail to properly focus on the personalizing ministry of Christ himself that is continuous in and through the church, and thus Torrance's Christocentric social ethics can offer a theological corrective or complement.

2. The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and its Practical Implications

Employing a variety of theological, scientific, and philosophical epistemologies, Torrance understands and asserts that human beings are onto-relational persons who subsist by and within relations. In particular, for Torrance, the human relationship with God is a "being-constituting relation" that is the creative source of human relational existence and life.[1] Torrance's theological discussion of human being and life, constituted through a relationship with God, is primarily found in his trinitarian theology and Christology, in which the concept of the vicarious humanity of Christ functions as the ontological key to his understanding of relational humanity.

The term "vicarious" (*vicarius* in Latin) means to "speak and act in place of another, on that other's behalf," which is precisely what Christ did for sinful humanity through his entire incarnational life, including birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension.[2] However, it is important to note that when Christ's humanity is regarded as vicarious, it refers to a dimension of being, not just a role, as the New Testament testifies that Christ, not like a human being but as a human being, acted in our place, and on our behalf, offering the perfect faith and obedience to God the Father that otherwise we could not achieve. In this sense, Torrance expounds that the vicarious humanity of Christ means that "Christ in his

[1] Thomas F. Torrance, "The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition," *Modern Theology* 4 (1988): 311.

[2] David Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ, Incarnate, Crucified, Risen, and Ascended," *Participatio* Supplement 2 (2013): 102.

humanity stands in our place and represents us," and thus "what is true of him is true of us, and what he did in his (our) humanity is ours."[3]

Torrance explains the ontological basis for relational humanity in terms of two movements in Christ's vicarious humanity: a movement from God to humanity and a movement from humanity to God. The first movement, from God to humanity, is emphasized in the incarnation. The doctrine of the incarnation encapsulates the mystery of God becoming human and the essence of grace. In this doctrine, we see the saving presence and action of the triune God and thus clearly recognize the incarnation as a trinitarian and salvific event. Interestingly, Torrance understands the incarnation to not only have soteriological but also anthropological significance. The incarnation is the event that brought about the healing and restoration of fallen human nature in such a way that Christ entered perfect and pure solidarity with us, sinners in his (our) fallen humanity subject to the wrath and judgement of God. As Torrance puts it:

> In all this the Son is wholly like us, in that he became what we are, but also wholly unlike us, in that he resisted our sin, and lived in entire and perfect obedience to the Father … Jesus was wholly unlike us in his actual human nature, for in his human nature he overcame the opposition and enmity of our fallen human nature to God, and restored it to peace with God.[4]

Therefore, in and through the incarnation, our fallen humanity that Christ assumed was united with his divinity. When Christ's divinity, which is of the same *ousia* as the Father, and our fallen humanity were united in the one person of Christ, humanity was healed, sanctified, and subjected to reconciliation with God in Christ. In this sense, the incarnation refers to the "reconciling union" of God and humanity.[5] Therefore, the incarnation is the ontological foundation from which the true restoration of human existence begins in and through union with God.

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[3] Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 205.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 64–66.

Torrance states that the incarnation has an anthropological significance that is evident in the theological thought of Athanasius and Gregory Nazianzen, particularly their concept of *theosis*. The Greek term *theosis*, meaning "becoming a god," is commonly translated as "divinization" or "deification." According to Torrance, the term was typically used and developed by the Eastern fathers to refer to the personal encounter and relationship between God and humanity, such as human beings created in the image of God, the Israelites invited into intimate fellowship with God, the incarnation, and our union with Christ through the Holy Spirit.[6]

The theological discussion of *theosis* primarily took place in relation to the incarnation. Since the incarnation was the locus in which the most intimate and personal encounters and communion between humanity and God were realized and atoning reconciliation was actualized, it is therefore the event of human participation in the divine nature in and through God in Christ. The church fathers regarded the participation embodied in the incarnation as soteriologically transforming human beings, life, relations, and destiny. In this respect, Nazianzen affirmed that "the unassumed is the unhealed; but what is united to God is saved,"[7] and Athanasius stated that the Son of God became incarnate so that we might be made a god, explaining that benefits such as the restoration of the image of God, knowledge of God, and incorruptibility were given by God to humanity through the incarnation:

> He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God. He manifested Himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father. He endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality… In short, such and so many are the Saviour's achievements that follow from His Incarnation, that to try to

[6] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1996), 96. According to Norman Russell, *theosis* was one of the important theological themes addressed by the church fathers who reinterpreted the Platonic concept of *theosis* from biblical content. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–2. Regarding the biblical evidence for *theosis* see, Basil Studer, "Divinization," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, Vol 1, ed. Angelo Di Beradina (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 242.

[7] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 164.

> number them is like gazing at the open sea and trying to count the waves.[8]

While movement from God to humanity is profoundly revealed in the incarnation, movement from humanity to God is precisely reflected in Christ's vicarious life. Drawing attention to the Pauline statement that the incarnate Christ offered the perfect faith and obedience to God the Father on behalf of sinners, Torrance argues that as our representative, Christ, in our place, for our sake, and on our behalf, offered the Father the perfect trust, obedience, understanding, knowledge, and worship, the full human response that is required in our relationship with God but that we as sinners cannot and will not have.[9] Hence, the whole of Christ's vicarious life that he offered the Father becomes our basic response to God.[10]

In Torrance's thought, it is the Holy Spirit who brings us the healing and restoration of human existence that was achieved objectively or ontologically through Christ's vicarious humanity, making it personally and subjectively realized in individual believers.[11] Through the creative work of the Spirit, we are united with Christ, made partakers in his new and true humanity, and drawn into the fellowship of the triune God. As a result, we are reconciled with God and transformed into true human beings in a personal relationship with God. In the process of reconciliation and transformation, our feeble and doubting faith becomes grounded in the faithfulness of Christ so we can have belief in and obey God on this basis.[12] Thus, the concept of Christ's vicarious humanity provides an ontological understanding of relational human beings and is central to the theological and ontological answer to the question of how human beings can be true to themselves in their relationship

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[8] St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans and ed. a religious of C.S.M.V (New York: St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1953), 93.

[9] Thomas F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 145.

[10] Elmer M. Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding his Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 113.

[11] Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke and Co, 1959), cvi–cxviii. At this point, Torrance's understanding of the role of the Spirit in terms of subjectifying the objective healing and restoration is identical to that of Barth.

[12] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 70.

with God and give a faithful response.

As elucidated, the human being who experiences reconciliation and healing through union with Christ is transformed in his/her relationship with God — the transformation of the vertical relationship. Torrance asserts that the reconciled and healed human being now lives out a true personal and relational life among fellow humans — the transformation of the horizontal relations. Thus, the reconciled vertical relationship invades horizontal relations, creating a true relational transformation. According to Torrance, human beings who are reconciled with God live out true personal and relational lives in relationships with others. As Torrance argues, ethical obligations in human relations reveal the divisive character of human existence. This means that the moral structures and ethical behaviors demanded in human relations highlight a fundamental gulf between "the human beings we are" and "the human beings we ought to be."[13] Although we strive to pursue sincere relations with others in accordance with laws and moral obligations, our fallen human existence and nature deceive us and others and thus result in hypocrisy. Based on this, true personal human relations and a voluntary moral life and practice are considered to be impossible unless the self-deception, hypocrisy, and selfishness of human nature is healed and overcome.

In and through the incarnate Son, however, fallen human nature experienced a "reconciling union" or "atoning reconciliation" with God and was thus healed and transformed.[14] Christ in himself transformed "fallen humanity" into "new humanity," breaking the rift in human nature and restoring true human existence, the *imago Dei*. In this sense, Torrance states, Christ is a "personalizing person," and we are the "personalized person."[15] When we are united with Christ through the Spirit, his personalizing work transforms our impersonal beings and relations into personal ones. This transformation draws us out of our self-centered and hypocritical ways and enables us to relate to God and our fellow humans in a true and personal way.

Therefore, the personalizing work of Christ creates a new moral life and

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 39.

[15] Ibid., 69–71.

order. As explained above, the moral behavior required in human relations is externally imposed by laws and morals. The fallen human nature, which is selfish and hypocritical, prevents us from willingly complying with moral demands. Yet Christ sincerely obeyed the Father from within his (our) humanity. His obedience did not result from an external relation and obligation, as legally prescribed, but from his inner childhood relations and love for the Father. In his vicarious humanity, Christ restored our fallen human nature, one that had come to reject and exhibit hostility to God, so that he could offer the Father a child's duty and love in perfect faith and obedience, without unfaithfulness or hypocrisy. In union with Christ, we are called to share his new and perfect humanity, thereby being personalized and enabled to participate in the true moral life and relations that Christ has established in our place. As a result, an external moral life and relation with God and our neighbors is transformed into an internal moral life and relations governed by love.[16]

The personalizing work of Christ extends to the transformation of social relations. Since human relational existence and life restored through union with Christ is situated within social structures, human society and its structures and orders can be continually renewed. In this discussion, Torrance draws our attention to the early church that did not have any program of political involvement or social transformation. However, as Torrance explains, when all members of the church were faithful to the evangelical imperatives of union with Christ, worship, prayer, evangelism, and service, the church had the power to reshape society and culture in its practice of love and mercy.[17] In this sense, for Torrance, the promise of social transformation is rooted in the personalizing person of Christ who is the creative source that progressively transforms society into a community of interpersonal love.

This is what Torrance calls the "soteriological suspension of ethics," an idea that refers to the way in which human relational existence and life is derived from

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[16] Thomas F. Torrance, "The Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 253.

[17] Thomas F. Torrance, *Gospel, Church, and Ministry*, ed. Jock Stein (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 166–171.

the vicarious humanity of Christ.[18] Torrance notes that since the possibility of ethics in human existence and relations are grounded in the person and work of Christ, theological discussions of ethical thought and practice that develop based on human possibilities in themselves must be suspended. The event of penetrating the abyss of distorted human existence, life and relations and healing and restoring them to a highly personal and relational state was fulfilled in and through Christ. Union with him through the Spirit embodies the personalization or the humanization of humanity. Thus, for Torrance, the vicarious humanity of Christ is the foundation of theological ethics, the ethical inquiry and practice of theology, and the starting point for relational human existence and life.

Torrance's concept of the 'soteriological suspension of ethics' clearly points to the ontological basis of theological ethics, focusing our attention on the ongoing personalizing work of Christ. In this sense, Christopher Holmes argues that Torrance's Christological emphasis reveals the anthropological significance of Christ's person and work as continuing to operate in reconciling mediation. Put another way; Christ is an "active agent" who continues to engage us in his work of personalization, through which we share in new humanity and enter into new and true lives and relations.[19] Interestingly, Holmes asserts that the importance and centrality of Torrance's emphasis on the person and work of Christ in theological anthropology and ethics is equally found in the theologies of Paul Lehmann and Kathryn Tanner, critiquing "exemplarism" that excludes Christ himself from his ongoing work of reconciliation and transformation.[20]

In summary, for Torrance, Christ's vicarious humanity and personalizing work transforms fallen humanity into a new humanity, giving rise to personal relations and true moral life and order in society. Thus, the person and work of Christ and our union with him through the Spirit constitute a distinctively Christian understanding and practice for human personal and relational life and society.

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[18] Torrance, "The Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross," 238. See also Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 160.

[19] Christopher R. J. Holmes, *Ethics in the Presence of Christ* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 23–25.

[20] Ibid.

3. The Sacramental Action of the Church and its Practical Implications

In Torrance's theology, in the church we can clearly see the continuous work of the vicarious humanity of Christ. In particular, the sacraments are the locus in which the church is united with Christ, renewed by him, and thus directed to its task of reconciliation in society. Thus, the sacramental action of the church has not only ontological but also practical significance. The church's participation in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist thereby serves to realize its ultimate telos and eschatological fulfilment, which signifies its ontological union with Christ to become the body *of* Christ and its movement from *sōma* (body) to *plērōma* (fulness) in the task of reconciliation.[21] Since the sacramental participation creates the church's existence and life or practice in a way that it is drawn into the reception of, participation in, and communion with Christ, it is thus renewed as a community of reconciliation, embodying its reconciled and diaconal life among people.[22] This is indicative of Torrance's theological perspective on the church's practicality, a perspective in which the church's sacramental participation is construed as the creative influence on ecclesial life and practice, serving as a transforming force in human society.

We will now consider Torrance's view of the church's practicality in more detail. For Torrance, the church's take on reconciliation must be deeply driven in the human society in which the divisive forces of sin are embodied.[23] Through the church, renewed as a community of reconciliation, individuals are able to enter the fellowship of those reconciled to God and one another and thus into union with

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[21] Thomas F. Torrance, "What is the Church?" *The Ecumenical Review* 11 (1958): 13–18. For Torrance, Baptism is a sacrament that focuses on what Christ has done — justification, while the Eucharist is a sacrament that focuses on what Christ continues to do — sanctification. Although the theological exposition of the sacraments and their characteristics is evident in Torrance's ecclesiology, the focus of this essay will be more on his thoughts on their practical implications in order to shed important light on the practicality of the sacraments. For Torrance's biblical and theological understanding of Baptism and the Eucharist, see Torrance F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), 82–138; *The Mediation of Christ*, 89–92; *Gospel, Church, and Ministry*, 85–92.

[22] Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 82 and *Gospel, Church, and Ministry*, 151.

[23] Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 72.

Christ. This has a reconciling influence, not only on a person's relationship with God and fellow humans but also on broader social dynamics and frameworks, as through reconciliation and renewal in Christ, the hostilities and divisions between people caused by sin in human social and cultural milieu are subject to an ongoing process of reconstruction and restoration.[24]

Torrance understands that the church, incorporated in Christ, and even in the deep divisions of the world, develops "a way of organised corporate and public life" that is consistent with the gospel it proclaims.[25] For Torrance, this ecclesial life expresses, realizes, and preserves the church's inherent universality that does not refer to "an exclusive coterie of the few but to an ever-widening communion in which the Body (*sōma*) presses out in expansion toward a fulness (*plērōma*) in the love of God," but instead means that all are gathered in the body of Christ regardless of race, or social or political status.[26] In this way, the church's universality invites individuals into its own fellowship of peace with God in Christ and with all of humanity, overcoming divisive patterns within the human social and cultural context. When the church is incorporated in Christ, its universality as the body of Christ takes place and begins to work so that the divine reconciliation embodied in Christ's vicarious humanity is unfolded horizontally within the divisions of the world into which the church is sent.[27] Therefore, when the church partakes of the Eucharist, the church "must live out in its own bodily existence the union and communion in which it participates in Christ."[28] In this way, in union with Christ, the church addresses the divisions of the world and seeks the renewal of humankind in the reconciling and recreating work of Christ who gathers and unites all things in himself.[29]

Torrance points out that ecclesial practice in the service of mercy to others,

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[24] Ibid., 21–24.

[25] Ibid., 24.

[26] Torrance, "What is the Church?" 17.

[27] Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 21–22.

[28] Torrance, "What is the Church?" 18.

[29] Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation*, 23.

that is, *diakonia*, is determined by the church's sacramental participation in Christ. Through the sacraments the church is in union with Christ and thus participates in the justification and sanctification that he has realized for the church. For Torrance, this union refers to union with Christ clothed with his gospel. Yet this also refers to union with Christ clothed with the needs and misery of humanity because, as Torrance explains, Christ, who achieved justification and sanctification, identified himself with us as sinners in our hopeless misery and abject need. In his vicarious life, Christ made the whole of human misery his own and thus became the *diakonos par excellence*, "the perfect model or example of compassionate service to the needy and distressed."[30] In the church's sacramental participation, Christ incorporates the church into his diaconal existence and life. The church is, therefore, transformed into "the bodily instrument which Christ uses in the proclamation of the divine mercy to mankind and in prompting their responses to that mercy."[31]

It is important to note that for Torrance, it is the vicarious humanity of Christ that reveals the very nature of the divine mercy, which regards the nature of human needs, misery, and suffering above all in the light of soteriology. As Torrance puts it:

> What distresses God so deeply as he looks upon man in his fearful condition is not simply his sickness and pain, nor even the torment of anxiety that gnaws at his inner being, but the fact that in his hostility to God man has become possessed of sin in his very mind and is caught in the toils of a vast evil that extends far beyond him, and what vexes God also is that man's existence breaks up under the pressure of guilt in it all and under the threat of the divine judgement upon him. In view of this tragic state the mercy of God takes on a dynamic and creative form in which he allies himself with man… That is why there took place in Jesus such a struggle with evil, a struggle that was waged between God and evil power not only in the heart and mind of man but in his bodily and historical existence, and a struggle to

[30] Torrance, *Gospel, Church, and Ministry*, 145.

[31] Ibid., 151.

> reclaim the existence of man as human being from its subjection to futility and negation.[32]

In Torrance's explanation above, the entirety of Jesus' diaconal life and work is not simply interpreted as "the service of kindness for kindness' sake," but as "a far profounder service of mercy that dealt with the real sting of evil by penetrating its sinful motion and undoing its guilt in atonement."[33] This is the characteristic of *diakonia* that is fulfilled through Christ's life as a vicarious service commanded by him and set as a task by him for every baptized member of his body.[34] This is why the ecclesial community that is united with Christ and clothed with humanity's needs and miseries offers its diaconal service to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. This is the continuing diaconal ministry of Christ in the concrete realities of humankind through his body.[35]

Insofar as the diaconal life of the church cannot be isolated from the organized welfare services of the state, the ecclesial action assumes the joint responsibility of the state and church in meeting human needs. In this respect, Torrance believes that the church's *diakonia* has not only an evangelical but also a social significance.[36] Therefore, for him, the diaconal life of the church is the way in which the ecclesial community reveals its distinctive social ethics. This can only be initiated through the *participatio Christi*, the supreme *diakonos* in his vicarious humanity.

4. Torrance's Corrective to "Exemplarism" Regarding Ecclesial Practice

As already elucidated, the practicality of theology derives from our *participatio Christi*. Since union with Christ the personalizing person, the humanizing man, engenders not only the personal transformation of individuals but also the personal

[32] Ibid., 146.

[33] Ibid., 152.

[34] Ibid., 140.

[35] Ibid., 156–157.

[36] Ibid., 154.

structures and order in social relations, for Torrance, the vicarious humanity of Christ and the church's communion with him in its sacramental action is the ontological foundation for ecclesial practice in society. In this sense, Torrance's approach to social ethics illustrates what should be the priority in terms of the practical implications and applications of theology, an approach that establishes a new moral life and order not in an autonomous moral philosophy but in Christ's vicarious humanity. Just as this kind of approach considers in depth and sheds important light on the role of his vicarious humanity in personalization, which enables us to sincerely follow moral obligations in relation to God and our fellow humans, it can offer a theological corrective to exemplarism, a theological effort that creates the church's social vision not in its ontological relationship with Christ but in its meaning *per se* in the sacraments, and thus detaches Christ himself from his continuing work.

James White, for instance, argues that Baptism has far-reaching implications for social justice, as Baptism, in which we are made sisters and brothers of Christ and thus neither rich nor poor, neither communist nor capitalist, conveys to the world "a sense of absolute equality," so that acts of love and charity for our fellow members of the church, including the homeless and the poor, are required as "a form of living out our baptism."[37] In a similar vein, John Howard Yoder insists that the sacraments shape Christian ethics, in which the practice of breaking bread and drinking wine in the Eucharist itself is "an economic act of sharing," and Baptism is a "social act of egalitarianism," forming a common and equal community despite social, political and economic differences.[38] In this approach, although Christ underlies the church's sacramental action and its resulting ethical implications, the main focus is not on Christ himself but on the ethical and socio-political meaning of the sacraments. Although such theological efforts may facilitate effective ecclesial practice, the undue ethical focus on the sacraments distracts our attention from the primary focus, that is, Christ himself and *participatio Christi*. This, after all, can risk giving priority to ethics, the signifier that the sacramental action might represent,

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[37] James F. White, *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 71.

[38] John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992), 21, 33, 40.

rather than to the person and work of Christ, which is the content, power and reality signified in the sacraments.

John Zizioulas is another instance reflecting exemplarism in ecclesial practice. He suggests that the church that participates in the sacraments shares the trinitarian communion and life and thus becomes the image of the Trinity. Zizioulas explains that in the baptism of the Spirit, the individual person is a participant in Christ and thus is transferred from the "*hypostasis* of biological existence" to the "*hypostasis* of ecclesial existence" in such a way that his or her incorporation into the communion of divine persons takes place in Christ.[39] He further explains that in the Eucharist, Christ makes a single body of the congregation and gives the church a "teste in the very life of the Holy Trinity" in which "communion and otherness are realized *par excellence*."[40] The church is therefore transformed and reshaped as an earthly existence reflecting the trinitarian being as communion in the distorted social forms of hierarches and developing a "non-hierarchical but truly communal" life and structures based on a "non-hierarchical doctrine of the Trinity."[41]

It is notable that in his explanation of the sacraments and their attendant social implications, Zizioulas does not give sufficient theological attention to union with Christ, despite his being at the center of the sacraments. As elucidated, for Zizioulas, Baptism and the Eucharist signify an ontological transformation from a self-centered humanity. Baptism is regarded as "a radical conversion from individualism to personhood," that is, a conversion from "the *hypostasis* of biological existence" to "the *hypostasis* of ecclesial existence." In this process, the theological weight is not on Christ himself but on the trinitarian communion that embodies our ecclesial being and life corresponding to the trinitarian personhood and life. Of course, the sacramental action of the church gives rise to an ontological transformation from sinful and self-centered humanity, but we must understand it

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[39] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 50–62.

[40] John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, ed. Paul McPartlan (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 7; *Being as Communion*, 21.

[41] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

as resulting from union with Christ in Baptism and the Eucharist. In this respect, Edward Russell rightly points out that in his thought on the sacraments Zizioulas focuses on "the signifier not the thing signified," that is, Christ and our union with him.[42] Thus, in Zizioulas' understanding of the church's social vision through the sacraments, we cannot properly recognize the true meaning of the sacraments, and consequently, it becomes unclear how our hypocritical and distorted humanity can be healed and restored through union with Christ and live out a truly personal life in society.

Considering the Christological deficiency of exemplarism in theological discussions of ecclesial practice, Torrance's focus on the vicarious humanity of Christ and *participatio Christi* can be regarded as a theological corrective or complement. If the theological account of the transformation of humanity in and through Christ and of personhood now in union with Christ through the Spirit fails, and thus the church's participation in Christ is not properly understood and pursued, then the church's practice is little more than an "imitation" of Christ or the triune God's characteristics of love, mercy, tolerance, and hospitality.

It is noteworthy that, as Kathryn Tanner argues, social trinitarians, including Zizioulas, fail to see and follow "what the economy of the Trinity itself is suggesting about human relations" when they take the trinitarian communion in the economy as "a model for our imitation" for human relations without deep theological speculation.[43] Although it is the life of Jesus that is taken by social trinitarians as an example to reveal the trinitarian communion for human imitation, it does not simply show us the kind of relations that human beings are supposed to have. Rather, it illustrates the way in which the trinitarian persons relate to one another in the incarnate presence of Christ healing and reconciling us, and then sharing the communion of the Trinity with us.[44] Thus, for Tanner, the trinitarian form of human

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[42] Edward Russell, "Reconsidering Relational Anthropology: A Critical Assessment of John Zizioulas's Theological Anthropology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 5 (2003): 179.

[43] Kathryn Tanner, "Trinity, Christology, and Community," in *Christology and Ethics*, eds. F. LeRon Shults and Brent Waters (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 71.

[44] Ibid., 70–73.

social life is realized not by imitating the personal and relational life of Jesus but by being united with Christ, who still draws us into his trinitarian relations and communion through the Spirit. Importantly, when Tanner derives the promise of the trinitarian patterns of human social structures from union with Christ, this signifies our ontological transformation and its resulting changes in social relations from that union. This is a genuine transformation that has a creative impact on the divisions and distortions in human social existence and relations.

In Torrance's theological thought and language, the ecclesial practice of "imitation" can be seen as complementing what the state may or may not do, or as a retreat into religious, social, and political matters.[45] This is the reason for his emphasis on Christ's vicarious humanity and union with Christ. As explained, for Torrance, it is Christ's vicarious humanity and union with him that justifies and sanctifies the church, rendering it a participant in the trinitarian communion. Torrance, like Tanner, understands that the church's being and life derive not from "*imitatio Christi*" but from "*participatio Christi*," which enables the church to not only be united with God, but also to be transformed as a community of reconciliation, living out its reconciled life in intercession, witness, and service in society.[46] For Torrance, this is indeed a way for the church to have its own distinct social ethics.

Thus, in Torrance's understanding of ecclesial practice, *participatio Christi* is essential not only for facilitating the transformation of ecclesial life with its transformative impact on society, but also for making ecclesial practice distinctive and effective. This refers to "the centrality of Christ" in terms of the creative source of the church's existence, life, and practice and its power to transform human society, an understanding that offers a corrective or complement to the theological attempts to propose a social vision of the church from "exemplarism" or "imitation of Christ."

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[45] Jock Stein, "Editor's Introduction," in Torrance, *Gospel, Church, and Ministry*, 14.

[46] Torrance, *Gospel, Church, and Ministry*, 153–155, 158–161.

5. Conclusion

We have seen the ways in which Torrance derives theological practicality from the vicarious humanity of Christ and *participatio Christi*. As explained, for Torrance, in and through the vicarious humanity of Christ our fallen humanity was healed, atoned, and sanctified, and thus personalized and humanized. Through the Spirit, we can have union with Christ, the personalizing person, the humanizing man, so we are transformed as a personalized person, humanized man who can sincerely follow moral obligations in a relationship with God and other fellow humans. The personalization derived from union with Christ engenders new moral relations and orders by which the distortions and divisions of social relations are progressively reshaped into interpersonal relations. Inasmuch as the personalizing work of Christ through the Spirit is embodied in the church, particularly in its sacramental action, the church is the very locus to which we draw our attention in thinking of where Christian social ethics begins.

We must keep in mind, however, that Torrance derives the promise of Christian social ethics not from the autonomous actions of the church but from its participation in Christ. In this regard, as elucidated, Torrance's theological approach to social transformation is different from exemplarism. Theological attempts at exemplarism that unduly emphasize the practical meanings of the sacraments themselves or the trinitarian communion and its anthropological and ethical implications for human society run the risk of losing sight of the personalizing person and work of Christ continuously working in and through the church as his body. Therefore, Torrance's Christocentric perspective must be regarded as a theological corrective or complement to this.

Torrance's social ethics, of course, focuses on ontological or hierarchical relations and meanings, while the social ethics that is found in exemplarism focuses on practical or horizontal relations and meanings. In this respect, Torrance can be regarded as a theologian who emphasizes "where" the theological practicality or social practice of the church are derived from, while those who seek social ethics in exemplarism emphasize "how" Christian theology and the church can have a transformative impact on impersonal and non-relational social order and structures. However, if the theological practice in society has both hierarchical and horizonal

relations and meanings, we should understand that this is not a matter of choice but a matter of priority. In this sense, Torrance's social ethics reminds us of what should be the priority in our thinking and acting on ethics, that is, the vicarious humanity of Christ and the church's *participatio Christi*.

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THOMAS F. TORRANCE'S THEOLOGY OF THE ASCENSION:

A Practical Theological Dogmatic Sketch

Stavan Narendra John, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Theology, South Asia Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, India

stavan.john@saiacs.org

Abstract: *This essay utilizes the three lenses of holism (ontology, spatiality, present ministry) from a recent study on Torrance's theology of the ascension to provide a practical theological dogmatic sketch. Specifically, through Torrance's trenchant acknowledgement of a robustly embodied ascended Christ, this work maintains that theological anthropology will be distinctly embodied in the eschaton, leading retrospectively and prospectively to a thoroughgoing rejection of all forms of Platonic thinking. Torrance's theology of space-time that affirms a spatiality attuned toward reconciliation and new creation arguably offers a macroscopic theological vision for concrete places in the world today. The salvific import of the doctrine of the ascension in Torrance's thought is a generative insight that can dialogue with proposals in mission theology that are calling for a paradigm shift from a cross-centered theology to one that is centered on the ascension, especially with respect to missions and evangelism. Cumulatively, through such an exploration, this article will demonstrate that Torrance's theology of the ascension is a fecund resource (albeit with certain shortcomings) that is not just theologically sophisticated but also practically relevant.*

1. Introduction

Torrance's theology is not known for its simplicity or accessibility. Elmer Colyer sheds light on this aspect of Torrance's work when he explains: "Torrance is a theological heavyweight whose writing style can be dense to the point of obscurity."[1] Torrance himself readily conceded that his theological writing is difficult to understand at points: "My weakness, I think, is my style. I do not know a way to put my theology across that makes for easy reading."[2] While the complexity of Torrance's writing has proved to be a stumbling block for some,[3] many others continue to find his theology richly rewarding. Colyer again helpfully captures this sentiment when he avers: "The difficulty and obscurity of Torrance's theology was frustrating, yet I repeatedly found myself coming to understand what I had always tacitly believed as a Christian in a way that deepened my faith and clarified my grasp of the theological structure of the gospel."[4] Contemporary studies on Torrance's theology acknowledge the challenges associated with reading and understanding his vast oeuvre "which canvas the fields of Christian dogmatics, science, philosophy, art, and culture."[5] Myk Habets, for instance, argues that in comparison to most of Torrance's "academic works," the sermons he wrote "by contrast are immensely and attractively readable and accessible."[6] Building on Habets's insights in my own work, I contend that Torrance's theological writings, with the ascension as a case study, demonstrate his remarkable ability to utilize art

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[1] Elmer M. Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 15–16.

[2] Michael Bauman, *Roundtable: Conversations with European Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 117–118.

[3] Robert J. Stamps, *The Sacrament of the Word Made Flesh: The Eucharistic Theology of Thomas F. Torrance* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2007), 290, for instance, observes in the context of Torrance's theology of the Eucharistic that: "Torrance's doctrine … might ultimately be disregarded not for its sheer realism, but for its sheer complexity."

[4] Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance*, 18.

[5] Myk Habets, "*Theologia* Is *Eusebia*: Thomas F. Torrance's Church Homiletics," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 259.

[6] Habets, "*Theologia* Is *Eusebia*: Thomas F. Torrance's Church Homiletics," 259.

and mystery to communicate dense theological concepts, not least the extra Calvinisticum, in a compelling manner. I therefore suggest that more work is needed to study Torrance's theology from a rhetorical perspective.[7] One can make a strong case that Torrance's theology is accessible on many levels, but needs to be studied from different vantage points, such as his sermons and his use of rhetoric, for example, to appreciate it. However, much more work is needed to investigate the various ways in which Torrance's rich theology can be made accessible to the church at-large.

It is not uncommon to hear Torrance scholars bemoan the fact that his theology is not read more widely in the church. Marty Folsom is intimately aware of this lacuna, and through his ongoing five-volume work entitled *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics for Everyone*, he is arguably providing a model for Barth scholarship that needs to be emulated for other theologians. Akin to how Folsom is making Barth's dense yet rich theology accessible to a vast ecclesial audience,[8] a similar work is needed on Torrance. In this regard, Gerrit Dawon's work on the ascension is an excellent example of how a technical theological locus such as the ascension can be translated to an ecclesial setting without compromising depth.[9] On a broader level, Stephen Morrison's overview of Torrance's theology in his *Plain English Series* commendably introduces his major theological themes in an accessible manner.[10] These three theologians, in their own respective ways, are theological translators,

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[7] Stavan Narendra John, "The Risen and Ascended Humanity of Christ in Thomas F. Torrance's Holistic Christology," (PhD diss., OCMS/Middlesex University 2022), 126–130.

[8] Two volumes in the series have been published so far: Marty Folsom: *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics for Everyone, Volume 1: The Doctrine of the Word of God: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners & Pros* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022); and *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics for Everyone, Volume 2: The Doctrine of God: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners & Pros* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023). Marty Folsom also leads a T. F. Torrance Reading Group (Zoom) that meets weekly to discuss both the primary and secondary resources on Torrance's theology. These videos are posted on the Facebook Reading Group page and on YouTube; therefore, they have a wide reach. For more, see: https://tftorrance.org/readingGroup; https://www.facebook.com/groups/209427593830583; https://www.youtube.com/@t.f.torrancereadinggroup5430.

[9] Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ's Continuing Incarnation* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004).

[10] Stephen D. Morrison, *T. F. Torrance in Plain English* (Columbus, OH: Beloved Publishing, 2017).

as it were, and are extending the reach of Torrance's theology to audiences that would otherwise probably not read his work. This is an ongoing task, and through this essay, I hope to join the conversation.

In this essay I seek to communicate some of the practical implications of Torrance's magisterial work on the ascension. Specifically, through Torrance's trenchant acknowledgement of a robustly embodied ascended Christ, I maintain that theological anthropology will be distinctly embodied in the eschaton, leading retrospectively and prospectively to a thoroughgoing rejection of all forms of Platonic thinking. Furthermore, through Torrance's theology of space-time that affirms a spatiality attuned toward reconciliation and new creation, arguably, he offers a macroscopic theological vision for concrete places in the world today. In addition, the salvific import of the doctrine of the ascension in Torrance's thought is a generative insight that can dialogue with proposals in mission theology that are calling for a paradigm shift from a cross-centered theology to one that is centered on the ascension, especially with respect to missions and evangelism. Cumulatively, through such an exploration of the ascension in dialogue with certain aspects of (1) theological anthropology, (2) theology of space-time, and (3) mission theology, this work aims to demonstrate that Torrance's theology of the ascension is a fecund resource (albeit with certain shortcomings) that is not just theologically sophisticated but also practically relevant.

2. Ascension and Theological Anthropology

Torrance's affirmation of an embodied ascended Christ (albeit in a transformed resurrection body) is trenchant and unequivocal.[11] Eloquently, Torrance explains: "The hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Jesus preserves the human and creaturely being he took from us."[12] He goes on to enumerate the implications such a view has for theological anthropology in this manner: "it is in and through our sharing in that human and creaturely being, sanctified and blessed

[11] For a more detailed overview of Torrance's views on the ascension vis-à-vis theological anthropology, see John, "The Risen and Ascended Humanity of Christ in Thomas F. Torrance's Holistic Christology," 56–62; 77–81.

[12] Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 136.

in him, that we share in the life of God while remaining what we were made to be, men and not gods."[13] In other words, humankind is assured an eschatological existence as human beings, and any fears of being expunged in the eschaton are to be dispelled. Torrance argues that to deny such a view would be tantamount to rejecting Christian orthodoxy.[14]

Torrance's vision of Christian eschatology is a clear rejection of Platonic thinking prospectively and retrospectively. By this, is meant, retrospectively, that all aspects of life are sacred. Any view that affirms a divide or a prioritization of the spiritual over the material aspects of life should be rejected as a *dualistic* imposition. Torrance fleshes out his theological anthropology primarily from a *theological* perspective,[15] but does not go on to provide a detailed elaboration of how his views entail practical implications. In recent scholarship, perhaps no one has been able to disseminate a theological anthropology that is holistic, accessible, and importantly grounded in a robustly corporeal account of the resurrection (and ascension) better than N. T. Wright.[16] Wright offers helpful insights that shed light on how an affirmation of Jesus's embodiment in the resurrection and ascension has significance for today.

Principally, Wright maintains that the future Christian hope of bodily resurrection provides a compelling rationale for ethics, social responsibility, and stewardship of one's vocation.[17]

The point of the resurrection … is that *the present bodily life is not*

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[13] Ibid., 136.

[14] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1960), 176.

[15] See John, "The Risen and Ascended Humanity of Christ in Thomas F. Torrance's Holistic Christology," 56–62.

[16] N. T. Wright: *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), which is aimed at an academic audience; and *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (London: SPCK, 2007), which is his popular book written for a wider readership.

[17] Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 193. Also see Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), who depends on Wright's work in several places to develop a theology of "vocational stewardship."

> *valueless just because it will die*. God will raise it to new life. What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it. And if this applies to ethics, as in 1 Corinthians 6, it certainly applies to the various vocations to which God's people are called. What you *do* in the present — by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself — *will last into God's future*.[18]

In another place, Wright sheds further light, specifically on 1 Corinthians 15:58 vis-à-vis how the future resurrection compels one to present action in society:

> Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings and for that matter one's fellow nonhuman creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit led-teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world — all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make.[19]

Torrance does not flesh out the implications of Jesus's resurrection and ascension in the manner that Wright does, but arguably, he would concur with everything that Wright espoused above. Retrospectively, therefore, Wright provides illuminating insights on how beliefs about the future should impact the way we live in the world today, and in doing so, provides resources for how Torrance's theological views could be illuminated in a practical manner. What about the prospective implications of Jesus's embodiment in the ascension?

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[18] Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 193. (Emphasis in original.)

[19] Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 208.

Prospectively, Torrance's views on the embodied ascended Christ impact the way we must think about our eschatological destiny as *corporeal* human beings. In case some think otherwise, he issues a cautionary exhortation: "There are people who imagine that in eternity all personalities are swallowed up and lost in God, that all temporal distinctions, and all that is finite and individual, melt into the infinite. That may be the view of some heathen Nirvana, but it is certainly not the teaching of the Christian faith."[20] Ultimately, for Torrance, the Christian eschatological vision is found in a new creation, which cannot now be fully grasped, but it will comprise "a new heaven and a new earth peopled with human beings living in holy and loving fellowship with God, with one another, and in harmony with the fullness of creation."[21] Importantly, he goes on to insist that such a destiny is not in an esoteric realm, but one wherein heaven and earth will be brought together: "the Kingdom of God is not a realm characterized by heaven only. It is a homely Kingdom with earth in it."[22] While Torrance is reticent to provide too many details about new creation, he does clarify that: "Whatever else that may mean it certainly implies a physical existence of created beings."[23]

In light of this, one can state that there will be persons with resurrected bodies in the new creation, but there will also be redeemed space and time.[24] Gender and sexuality, as male and female, in its redeemed form will also be present

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[20] Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*, 176.

[21] Ibid., 177.

[22] Ibid., 176.

[23] Ibid.

[24] See Thomas F. Torrance: *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997); *Space, Time and Resurrection*. See also John, "The Risen and Ascended Humanity of Christ in Thomas F. Torrance's Holistic Christology," 91–134.

in the new creation, as well as redeemed ethnicity.[25] Importantly, the resurrected and embodied ascended Christ will be in the new creation and will continue to mediate God the Father to human beings there.[26] This is an aspect of the *visio Dei* that is debated within theology generally,[27] but Torrance clearly interprets the *visio Dei* Christologically: "The Father whom we shall see yonder is none other than Him whom we see in Jesus. Yonder we shall see Him in a fullness of vision which is denied to us here, but it will ever be God as revealed to us in Jesus and no other for there is no other."[28] Torrance's views on the ascension vis-à-vis theological anthropology have significant practical implications, as this section has demonstrated. It will pay to focus on how his views on the ascension in relation to space-time have consequences for today.

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[25] See Thomas F. Torrance, "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective," in *Religion, Reason and the Self: Essays in Honour of Hywel D. Lewis*, ed. Stewart R. Sutherland and T. A. Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989), 109, where he clarifies that gender and sexual differentiation as male and female will continue in the eschaton, albeit without sexual procreation: "this divinely instituted union between man and woman is a characteristic not only of their creation but of their life in the resurrection in which their creation as man and woman will be brought to its ultimate completion." See Thomas F. Torrance, "Salvation is of the Jews," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 22 (1950): 166, where he explains that Jesus's ethnicity is not something he gave up at the resurrection but continues to possess it: "when God came into this world He came as Jew. And to this very day Jesus remains a Jew while still the eternal Son of God."

[26] Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*, 182–183.

[27] The debate surrounds what role the person of Christ will play in the *visio Dei*. For some, the *visio Dei* will be mediated through the person of Christ; for others, human beings will be able to see God without Christ's mediation, and for still others, Christ will play a role in mediating the *visio Dei*, but the vision of God will not be solely fixated on the person of Christ, but on the Triune God *through* Christ. See Suzanne McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ: John Owen and the 'Reforming' of the Beatific Vision," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (London: Routledge, 2016), 141–158; Simon Francis Gaine, "Thomas Aquinas and John Own on the beatific vision: A Reply to Suzanne McDonald," *New Blackfriars* 97 (2016): 432–446; Gavin Ortlund, "Will We See God's Essence? A Defence of a Thomistic Account of the Beatific Vision," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74 (2021): 323–332.

[28] Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*, 183.

3. Ascension and Theology of Space-Time

Torrance's theology of space-time vis-à-vis the ascension takes its point of departure from the incarnation.[29] In other words, the incarnation and the ascension share similar space-time theological convictions. Says Torrance, "As in the incarnation we have to think of God the Son becoming man without ceasing to be transcendent God, so in his ascension we have to think of Christ as ascending above all space and time without ceasing to be man or without any diminishment of his physical, historical existence."[30] Just as the incarnation does not amount to an elimination of the divinity of the Son, Torrance declares, so too, in the ascension, the humanity of Christ is not surrendered.[31] Importantly, this means that what happens to Christ in the ascension has direct ramifications for space-time as well, which Torrance expounds through the category of "redemption," rather than eradication.[32] To this end, Torrance urges one to recognize that "the resurrection means the *redemption of space and time*, for space and time are not abrogated or transcended. Rather they are healed and restored."[33] This category of "redemption," notwithstanding Torrance's many other notable contributions in this area, sheds light on how his theology of space-time has implications for today.

Alister McGrath correctly points out that Torrance's theology of space-time is principally "physicalist or ontological" in nature, thereby underscoring the reality of God's condescension into our human space-time reality.[34] McGrath commends Torrance's prioritization of the objective reality of God's interaction with our space-time, because it undercuts "subjective approaches," "vested interacts and personal

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[29] For a more detailed exploration of Torrance's theology of the ascension vis-à-vis space-time, see John, "The Risen and Ascended Humanity of Christ in Thomas F. Torrance's Holistic Christology," 91–134.

[30] Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 129.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 90.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Alister McGrath, "Place, History and Incarnation: On the Subjective Aspects of Christology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 75 (2022): 138.

biases" that human beings can foist onto a theology of space and time.[35] However, McGrath also accurately observes that Torrance's spatial theology of the incarnation does not sufficiently address the "subjective impact of Christ on embodied humanity."[36] He goes on to construct a model that balances the "objective" with the "subjective,"[37] in a theology of space-time, particularly by taking into account the "affective"[38] aspects.

Inspired by Simeon Zahl's critique of the lack an "affective"[39] emphasis in theology in general and Torrance in particular, McGrath seeks to develop a theological model of space-time that explores the impact of "subjective human concerns and interests" as well.[40] McGrath does this principally by utilizing the concepts "'history'" and "'place,'" which he believes will extend Torrance's own theology of space-time in ways that address *both* theological and philosophical issues, but also existential concerns.[41] Propelled by such a conviction, McGrath explains: "the … concepts of 'history' and 'place' captures the fact that both are domains of human habitation and construction, and hence are linked with a series of existentially significant issues (such as the shaping of personal and cultural identity) that affect the way we feel about and act within the world."[42] The practical outworking of such an approach, for instance, will mean simultaneously affirming two aspects when one looks at the doctrine of the incarnation. The focus will not just be on discerning with Torrance (1) "objectively … how a transcendent God could be positioned using the four coordinates *x*, *y*, *z*, and *t*," but also (2) subjectively with Zahl and McGrath: "to believe rightly in the Incarnation is to be

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[35] McGrath, "Place, history and incarnation," 139.

[36] Ibid., 140.

[37] Ibid., 140–147.

[38] Ibid., 139–140. McGrath's theological construction on the "affective" aspects of space and time is inspired by Simeon Zahl's work on the subject. For more, see Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[39] McGrath, "Place, History and Incarnation," 139.

[40] Ibid., 139.

[41] Ibid., 140.

[42] McGrath, "Place, history and incarnation," 140.

filled with the affection of love."[43] This constructive suggestion from McGrath will certainly bolster Torrance's own account in helpful ways. There is, however, a seed idea in Torrance's own theology that must be noted here, because it can add to the excellent insights on the "affective"[44] aspects that McGrath highlights.

Torrance's affirmation of both oneness and threeness within the Trinity can shape a theology of space-time that has significant practical implications. Torrance writes: "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinctive Persons … [who] dwell *in* one another … in such an intimate way … that their individual characteristics instead of dividing them from one another unite them indivisibly … and yet in the mystery of their perichoretic inter-relations they are not three Gods but only one God."[45] This fundamental theological conviction about the Trinity — of both oneness and threeness can shape a theology of spatiality in important ways. While Torrance himself does not flesh out the implications, Murray Rae and John Webster do so in ways that are arguably consonant with Torrance's theology.

Writing in the context of Barth's theology of space from a Trinitarian perspective, Rae explains that "Space is, on Barth's account, a condition by which one person is differentiated from another — in God first!"[46] Importantly, Rae notes that this means: "proximity and distance are essential to the distinction of and communion between the divine persons."[47] As stated above, Torrance would concur with this theological view about "proximity and distance,"[48] but it is important to see how such a view would be helpful in shaping a practical theology of space-time. Webster is especially helpful in this regard because he is convinced that "distance

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[43] Simeon Zahl, "On the Affective Salience of Doctrines," *Modern Theology* 31 (2015): 432. McGrath quotes this phrase from Zahl in his article. For more see: McGrath, "Place, History and Incarnation," 147.

[44] McGrath, "Place, History and Incarnation," 139–140.

[45] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 172.

[46] Murray Rae, "The Spatiality of God," in *Trinitarian Theology after Barth*, ed. Myk Habets and Phillip Tolliday (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2012), 79.

[47] Ibid., 79.

[48] Ibid.

and proximity" undergird a theology of spatiality that fosters "mutuality and togetherness" — between God and human beings, and consequently between human beings themselves.[49] However, Webster is keenly aware that in such a theological conceptualization of space, various "sinful perversion[s]" could conceivably set a new agenda that is opposed to God's telos for space.[50] "[R]elative independence" was meant to lead to "spatial relation," but it could lead instead to "spatial autonomy."[51] Similarly, "mutual determination of creatures" was designed by God to be good, but instead of leading to deep interpersonal relationships, the very antithesis of this could obtain – people could end up as "agnostics."[52] Furthermore, "the gift of space" is a wholly good notion, but instead of fostering benevolence, it could end up as "possessed territory."[53] However, in and through the incarnation, Webster declares, Christ overcomes all antithetical forces and sets space aright:

> He has set an end to the wicked project of spatial autonomy. In him all creaturely places are reordered, by being claimed with the full authority of the one who is Lord of heaven and earth, as the spaces in which we are to discover the presence of God. And being so claimed, they are also made into places of adjacency to other creatures…. in Jesus Christ, now present to all places through the Spirit's power, space is made a medium of fellowship.[54]

Rae and Webster's insights clearly show how a Trinitarian spatial theology can be fleshed out in practical ways to underscore mutuality and deep interpersonal relationships. Together with McGrath's constructive contributions, there are clear suggestions about how Torrance's rich theology of space-time can be practically

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[49] John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 105.

[50] Ibid., 106.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., 106–107.

relevant to the church and world at large. Having briefly explored the practical implications of Torrance's theology of the ascension vis-à-vis theological anthropology and a theology of space-time, it is important to discern how his theology can dialogue with certain discussions taking place within mission theology.

4. Ascension and Mission Theology

The ascension is a crucial doctrine in Torrance's theology. He underscores this fact when he declares that the "Ascension is not just an addendum to the story of Jesus, a ringing down of the curtain on his earthly life, but it is one of the great essential salvation events."[55] This is so, Torrance explains, because the goal of the incarnation was not fully realized until the ascension; it is in the ascension that the ultimate destiny for humankind is manifested. To this end, Torrance points out that the ascension "was the completion of the Incarnation event … The very same body which had been born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, and died and was buried, ascended into heaven for the accomplishment of all things. Thus, the saving work of Christ reaches up into eternity, into the ultimate mystery of God."[56] Far from being static, however, the doctrine of the ascension, for Torrance, testifies to the ongoing present ministry of Jesus, not least through his ministry of intercession.[57] Torrance writes, "The Heavenly Session of Christ speaks of the fact that he ever lives to make intercession for us as our Advocate and High Priest and only Mediator, and prays and intercedes for us."[58] David Fergusson memorably summarizes Torrance's stress on the *ongoing* nature of Christ's ministry after the cross: "The work of Christ neither begins nor ends on the cross; rather, it is a function of his person as the living and active Word of God."[59]

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[55] Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 21.

[56] Ibid., 21.

[57] Ibid., 22. For a fuller exploration of Torrance's emphasis on the present ministry of Jesus in light of the ascension, see John, "The Risen and Ascended Humanity of Christ in Thomas F. Torrance's Holistic Christology," 135–176.

[58] Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 22.

[59] David Fergusson, "The Ascension of Christ: Its Significance in the Theology of T. F. Torrance," *Participatio* 3 (2012): 95.

Torrance develops the present ministry of Christ in light of the ascension. In other words, there is an actual *ongoing* aspect to Christ's ministry in the present, rather than merely appropriating the benefits of Christ's earthly ministry to the present-day context.[60] While Torrance utilizes the *munus triplex* to provide keen insights on how Christ's present ministry is shaped by the ascension, there are certain shortcomings. He robustly develops the priesthood of Christ but does not pay sufficient attention to providing an in-depth theological reflection on the kingship and prophetic ministries of the ascended Christ.[61] Nonetheless, Torrance's theology of the present ministry of Christ is robust and well-suited for a range of practical applications. For instance, Torrance's theology of the present ministry of the ascended Christ can helpfully dialogue with some recent developments in mission theology on the significance of the doctrine of the ascension.

Missionary and theologian Herbert Hoeffer, in an article entitled "Gospel Proclamation of the Ascended Lord," persuasively argues for a paradigm shift in missiological strategy for shame-based cultures, wherein instead of beginning with the cross, the ascension serves as an effective starting point.[62] He insists that people in shame-based cultures require a presentation of the Gospel that does not follow the typical way in which it is presented in Western cultures.[63] Rather than start by saying: '"Receive the forgiveness of sin won for you by Christ and have the gift of eternal life,'"[64] (Western), Hoeffer proposes starting with pressing questions

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[60] See Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 106–122.

[61] See ibid., 112–122, where Torrance's exposition of the priestly ministry of Christ is much longer the sections dedicated to expounding the kingly and prophetic ministries of the ascended Christ. For a constructive attempt at expanding on Torrance's account, see John, "The Risen and Ascended Humanity of Christ in Thomas F. Torrance's Holistic Christology," 162–172.

[62] Herbert Hoeffer, "Gospel Proclamation of the Ascended Lord," *Missiology: An International Review* 33 (2005): 435–449.

[63] Ibid. On page 436, Hoeffer highlights the difference between a "guilt-based society" and a "shame-based society" as follows: "In the guilt-based society, individuals have internalized a set of moral standards, and they feel personal guilt is they fail to live up to those standards. In the shame-based society, individuals are very aware of the judgment of their social peers and authorities. If they violate these people's expectations, they feel great shame."

[64] Ibid., 435.

from the various contexts that comprise shame-based cultures (Eastern).[65] "In tribal African societies, the question is if there is a power that can control the powerful, capricious spirit world… [I]n China … the question … [is] if Christianity can produce a better person and a better society. In India, the spiritual quest is for a truly spiritual character."[66]

Hoeffer is convinced that by starting with the ascension rather than the cross in one's gospel proclamation, one is not only being theologically sound but importantly also contextually sensitive.[67] From a theological perspective, Hoeffer finds justification for this shift in approach in the manner in which the apostle Paul encountered Christ on the road to Damascus.[68] Paul's starting point was "the Ascension," which then enabled him to better understand "the implications of the resurrection and the crucifixion."[69] Paul's experience, Hoeffer observes, resonates with the way in which people from other faiths are encountering Christ. Says Hoeffer, "people of other religions primarily come to a relationship with Jesus through their experience of him as ascended Lord of history. From there, they will go on to an understanding of Jesus' life and work and an acceptance of him as Savior. However, they generally come to receive him as personal Savior only after they have received him as personal Lord."[70]

The proposed shift in evangelistic approach from one that is centered on the cross to an ascension-centered one seems to be theologically and practically prudent. Nevertheless, one must be careful not to create a divide between the cross and the ascension. In some contexts, the doctrine of the cross is probably not the best approach to begin with in evangelism because it may create unnecessary obstacles. With this said, however, there can be a danger of undermining the cross in favor of the ascension, or even separating the cross from the ascension. One

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[65] Ibid., 438.

[66] Ibid., 438.

[67] Ibid., 442.

[68] Ibid., 438.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 442.

illustration will underscore this point. Hoeffer, in an appendix to his article, highlights the exasperated views of a "Jesu Bhakta."[71] "Jesu Bhaktas" are "followers of Jesus still living in their Hindu communities,"[72] and one in particular wrote to Hoeffer to express his frustration with the all-encompassing role the cross plays in Christian theology.[73]

In his own words, this "Jesu Bhakta" states: "I do not doubt that Christ is the incarnate God. But I think the crux of all Christianity is that the Incarnation was for the purpose of redemption. And it is this latter point that has been a stumbling block for me. It seems to me that Christians focus more on the sacrifice on the cross than on the living, resurrected Christ."[74] Elsewhere he explains that the cross "does not seem to have a personal application," and furthermore that "It is the living, resurrected, ascended Christ that I can relate to."[75] The views of the "Jesu Bhakta" underscore the point Hoeffer has made in his whole article, which is that a different approach must be adopted in evangelism in majority world contexts, particularly in Asia, where instead of beginning with the cross one can start with the ascension. Nonetheless, it would seem like an approach that balances the cross with the ascension would provide a holistic account that would be effective in the long term in both evangelism and discipleship. It is at this point that T. F. Torrance's theology of the ascension would be a helpful dialogue partner.

Torrance contends that the cross and ascension are deeply interconnected doctrines and must not be separated. On the basis of biblical passages, among others, such as John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34 he insists that "the glorification of Christ begins not with his actual ascension or resurrection, but with his crucifixion."[76] He goes on to argue that "the ascension of Christ … is his exaltation

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[71] Ibid., 448–449.

[72] Ibid., 439.

[73] Ibid., 448.

[74] Ibid. These are the views of the "Jesu Bhakta" that Hoeffer documents in the appendix to his article.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 110.

to power and glory but *through the Cross*, certainly an exaltation from humiliation to royal majesty, but through crucifixion and sacrifice, for the power and glory of the Royal Priest are bound up with his self-offering in death and resurrection."[77] For Torrance, therefore, the cross and ascension, as doctrines, are mutually reinforcing; one cannot have one without the other.

The above theological insight would commend and supplement the existing stress on the ascension within mission theology, as represented by Herbert Hoeffer, in the following manner. It would commend the strong emphasis on the ascension as a soteriologically significant doctrine. It would, however, provide a supplement not necessarily to Hoeffer, who does not separate the cross from the ascension, but to some "Jesu Bhaktas" who may prioritize the ascension over the cross to such as extent that the two doctrines could become detached from one another. The supplement Torrance provides is a clarification that the ascended Jesus *is* the Jesus who was crucified and vice-versa. This emphasis is evidenced when Torrance explains that "Christ Jesus crucified and risen is on the Throne."[78] Importantly, he goes on to add that "Jesus … is now at the right hand of God holding the reins of the world in his hands, the hands that bore the imprint of the nails hammered into them on the cross."[79] The interconnection between the cross and the ascension, therefore, provides a safeguard against theologies that prioritize experience over history, or "glory" over "suffering."[80] Therefore, in light of the supplement Torrance offers, the missiological strategy of beginning with the ascension in certain contexts would not need to change. What would need to be added to the strategy, however, is a clarification that there is no divide between the ascension and the cross. In this way, an evangelist can communicate the Gospel in a culturally sensitive manner, even while being faithful to Scripture and to theological orthodoxy, resulting in a holistic pedagogy for discipleship.

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[77] Ibid., 111.

[78] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), 194.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 134 and 123, respectively.

5. Conclusion

This essay provides a practical theological dogmatic sketch on key facets of Torrance's theology of the ascension, to show how his rich theology can be made more accessible to a wide ecclesial audience. Torrance affirms an embodied ascended Christ, which has enormous practical implications, not least a thoroughgoing rejection of platonic thinking, retrospectively and prospectively. The complex spatial theology that Torrance espouses is shown to have an undergirding theological and practical impulse — namely, the need for space to be oriented toward relationality, reconciliation, and redemption. Torrance's stress on the ascension as a soteriologically significant doctrine is germane to the contemporary call for a paradigm shift from a cross-centered to an ascension-centered focus in mission theology to majority world contexts. It was noted that while Torrance would affirm the strong emphasis on the ascension for missions and evangelism, he would always want to integrate the cross with the ascension, lest one end up with a deficient theology and, in turn, an inadequate pedagogy for discipleship. Cumulatively, each of these three areas (ontology, spatiality, present ministry) of the ascension in Torrance are not only theologically sophisticated but immensely relevant and practical to the church at large. The work of theologically translating Torrance's work on a variety of foci is an ongoing one. As more theologians work in this area, the church will benefit from a theological voice who deserves to be read widely. This is an exciting prospect!

Chancellor Stillwell, "Preaching a Faith Not Our Own: Torrance and the Vicarious Faith of Christ," *Participatio* 12: "The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance" (2024), 47-70; #2024-CS-1.
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PREACHING A FAITH NOT OUR OWN:

Torrance and the Vicarious Faith of Christ

Chancellor Stillwell, Ph.D. Candidate

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

cb7still@gmail.com

Abstract: *Evangelicals often find themselves doubting the sincerity of their personal decision for Christ, resulting in an existential fear of rejection by God. By examining Torrance's writing on conversion and faith, this paper argues that such doubt arises from a dualistic, deistic understanding of faith that fails to consider the vicarious humanity of Christ. Such salvific anxiety and doubt are resolved if personal faith is instead viewed as ontologically rooted in Christ's vicarious faith offered to the Father as humanity's substitute and representative. Since many Evangelical traditions include a time for response after the preaching event, homiletical guidance for offering a clear invitation for conversion that includes this nuanced understanding of faith is presented.*

1. Introduction

Homileticians have long argued that preaching should aim for a response from its listeners. Though calls for a decision are appropriate to the homiletical event, an overemphasis on encouraging listeners to place their faith in Christ has resulted in an inability for listeners to have assurance of their salvation, being that it was conditioned on their response to the gospel. Thomas F. Torrance has identified this trend and stated, "There is a kind of subtle Pelagianism in preaching and teaching which has the effect of throwing people back in the last resort on their own act of faith, so that in the last analysis responsibility for their salvation rests upon themselves, rather than on Christ."[1] As a solution to this "subtle Pelagianism," Torrance proposes the vicarious humanity of Christ, which shifts one's focus from one's subjective faith in Christ to faith's object: the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. It is his faith, not the believer's, that saves. Therefore, this paper will argue that preaching the vicarious humanity of Christ — and his vicarious faith by extension — shifts the burden of salvation from the shoulders of humanity to those of Jesus, providing a greater sense of assurance for the believer.

I will begin by briefly reviewing how the church dealt with a dualistic understanding of faith at Nicaea and the Reformation. Torrance hopes to retrieve the unitary thinking that occurred during these two periods as he applies the vicarious humanity of Christ to today's current misunderstanding about the nature of faith. A brief doctrinal analysis of Christ's vicarious humanity will then be offered before considering how Evangelicalism has sought to address issues of faith and assurance today, with particular focus given to J. D. Greear's *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart* as an interlocutor that seeks to offer a solution at a popular level.[2] The final section of this essay considers how preaching can articulate the vicarious

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[1] Thomas F. Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today: The Gospel and Scientific Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 35.

2 J. D. Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2013). Greear is the pastor of Summit Church, a multisite congregation with more than 10,000 weekly attendants. The breadth of his ministry, coupled with the popularity of his book among American Evangelicals, made him a helpful interlocuter for the common perception of faith at a popular Evangelical level.

humanity of Christ so that misconceptions surrounding faith are mitigated or ameliorated, particularly in preaching's call for a response from listeners.

2. Dualism, Deism, and Faith

Understanding how the church has combatted dualistic thought — that being the bifurcation of spirit and matter, God and the world — in the past can teach contemporary preachers how to deal with the faith crisis of the present. Torrance sees the church combatting dualistic thought during three historical periods: the early church, the Reformation, and today. In his eyes, there are epistemological similarities between the current intellectual climate and that of the fourth century. The unification of the being and act of God in the person of the Son was "the supreme truth" that the early church established in clarifying the doctrine of the *homoousion*.[3] The *homoousion* worked against the cultural climate, which "worked with a radical dualism between the sensible world and the intelligible world, or between appearance and reality."[4] In the doctrine of the *homoousion*, Spirit and matter, Creator and creation, were brought into a unification that confounded the expectations of many of that time, as evident in the numerous heresies that arose in resistance to the doctrine. Torrance writes the following:

> By giving conceptual expression to oneness between the Son of God become man in our world of space and time and God the Creator of heaven and earth and of all visible and invisible reality, the early church set aside at a stroke the epistemological dualism of Greek thought and did something that penetrated into and changed the very foundations of knowledge in the ancient world.[5]

Torrance sees a similar effect achieved at the Reformation through reconsidering the notion of grace in light of the Nicene Creed's affirmation of the Holy Spirit as the Lord and Giver of life, where the Giver and the Gift are the same. In the pre-Reformation period, a conception of grace had arisen whereby it was thought of "as

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[3] Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today*, 14.

[4] Ibid., 15.

[5] Ibid., 16.

something detached from God, but if the Nicene principle that the gift and the Giver are one applies to grace, then it is impossible to think of grace or of the Spirit as endowments bequeathed by Christ to the church to be administered under the authority of the church."[6] Instead, the gift of grace by Christ the giver are one and the same: "properly understood grace is Christ, so that to be saved by grace alone is to be saved by Christ alone."[7]

Torrance noted that the church has had to continually struggle against a theological tendency to bifurcate the being and act of God, which is all the more prevalent in today's deistic society that has seen a massive upsurge in "relativism, secularism, and syncretism."[8] His solution? Preach Christ in accordance with his singularity in being with God. Furthermore, he sees a focus upon the vicarious humanity of Christ as the current need of the hour.[9] For it is through the vicarious humanity of Christ that the deistic framework of modern thought can be overcome as it forces people to come to grips with a God who is ontologically connected to themselves and not distant or on the other side of some sort of conceptual chasm.

3. The Vicarious Humanity of Christ

The Hypostatic Union

In order to address the crisis of faith facing the church today, Torrance encouraged consideration of Christ's faith, but his faith must be approached upon acknowledging his ontological union with humanity. The starting point of Christology, however, is neither the fact that God became man (a Christology from above), nor an examination of his life and its testimony as credence to his divine status (a Christology from below). It is to take both of these realities at once. Torrance asserts,

> he is God, and very God, and yet man and very man: God and man become one person. We know Christ in the mystery of that duality.

[6] Ibid., 20.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 21.

[9] Ibid., 30.

> That is the starting point for a true Christology — and that is precisely where the witness of the New Testament faces us, face to face with Christ in his wholeness as God and man.[10]

It is the hypostatic union where Torrance sees the beginning of Christology, not a dualistic pattern of thought that seeks to first consider his deity in absence from his humanity or his humanity in absence from his divinity. Consideration must therefore simultaneously be given to the double movement of God to man and man to God that make up the one life of Christ.

God to Humanity

The incarnation is just as much a part of the atonement as the cross, for it is here that God plunged into the depths of human depravity in order to redeem not only his sinful flesh but the mind as well. Thus, Torrance argued for the church to affirm that at the incarnation Christ assumed a fallen human nature.[11] Gregory of Nazianzen declared, "The unassumed is the unhealed," and so it was necessary for Christ to not only take on the likeness of sinful flesh but to redeem the cognitive fallenness of the human mind as well.[12] Therefore, Torrance asks:

> If the Word of God did not really come into our fallen existence, if the Son of God did not actually come where we are, and join himself to us and range himself with us where we are in sin and under judgment, how could it be said that Christ really took our place, took our cause upon himself in order to redeem us?[13]

Because the assumption of fallen human flesh was an ontological union, it was a sanctifying, restorative, and redemptive event.[14] "Thus, his taking of our flesh of sin

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[10] Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 3.

[11] Ibid., 61–64, 201, 231–32.

[12] Gregory of Nazianzus, "Letter 101," in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel R. Wickham, Popular Patristic Series 23 (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 158.

[13] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 62.

[14] Ibid., 63.

was a sinless action, which means that Jesus does not do in his humanity what we do, namely, sin, but it also means that by remaining holy and sinless in our flesh, he condemned sin in the flesh he assumed and judged it by his very sinlessness."[15] If Christ's human nature was merely neutral, like that of a pre-fallen Adam, then would not the life he lived be one only of moral example, demonstrating that God's love stopped short of identifying with men and women as they really are in their estrangement from God?[16] Here, the doctrine of the an/enhypostasia can keep one from misunderstanding what Torrance seeks to accomplish in articulating that Christ assumed fallen human flesh. Van Kuiken offers a brief description of Christ's assumed flesh:

> Considered in itself, apart from him as Son or Word, it is *anyhypostatic*, having no personhood of its own. In the Incarnation, the Son assumes a human nature, not a human person. But considered in its union with the Son, his human nature is *enhypostatic*: it participates in his Personhood, being personalized in him even as the Person of the Son is humanized in it (though without diluting his divinity).17

Van Kuiken sees the distinction between *an/enhypostasia* as clarifying for Christ's atoning work at the incarnation as well. "Whenever Torrance speaks of the human nature assumed by Christ as sinful, depraved, and the like, he is viewing it anhypostatically — that is, apart from its sanctifying union with the Person of Christ. Whenever Torrance speaks of Christ's humanity as sinless, pure, and holy, that humanity is being considered enhypostatically."[18] This distinction is key because it demonstrates that atonement was not relegated only to the cross but

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Jerome Van Kuiken, "'Not I, but Christ:' Thomas F. Torrance on the Christian Life," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 246.

[17] Van Kuiken, "Thomas F. Torrance on the Christian Life," 244; For a fuller description of the *an/en-hypostasis* in Torrance's thought see Robert T. Walker, "The Innovative Fruitfulness of *An/En-Hypostasis* in Thomas F. Torrance," in T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 189–206.

[18] Van Kuiken, "Thomas F. Torrance on the Christian Life," 246.

began at Christ's very conception. Christ redeemed humanity's fallen nature and then lived that life before God as a man on behalf of all people.

Humanity to God

Jesus Christ is the response of humanity to God; the true servant of the Lord, who hears his voice and obeys his commands. Thus, Jesus Christ is the mediator of both revelation and reconciliation, embodying both acts.[19] Christ is not only the Word of God to humanity, who makes himself known in his own act of self-communication, but he is also the one who receives that Word and responds to it in humble obedience through his own humanity.[20] He is both spoken Word and listening ear, who in turn offers his own response back to God as man on behalf of man.[21] It is not just the incarnation or the crucifixion that is necessary for atonement, in Torrance's view, but every aspect of Christ's being and act from cradle to grave.[22] In his humanity, Christ offers the needed response of humanity to God through his faithful obedience and trust. Elmer Colyer writes, "Jesus Christ, in his vicarious humanity, *is* God's act of incarnational atonement and therefore the very heart of the gospel."[23] Thus, there are two key aspects to Christ's vicarious atoning work: substitution and representation.

Substitution and representation are in no way bifurcated within Torrance's doctrine of Christ's vicarious humanity. Torrance writes:

> It will not do to think of what Christ has done for us only in terms of representation, for that would imply that Jesus represents, or stands for, *our* response, that he is the leader of humanity in humanity's act of response to God. On the other hand, if Jesus is a substitute in

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[19] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, Revised edition (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 23.

[20] Thomas F. Torrance, *God and Rationality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 145.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 80.

[23] Elmer M. Colyer, *How to Read T.F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 111; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, Second edition, T&T Clark Cornerstones (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 4, 8, 145–154.

> detachment from us, who simply acts in our stead in an external, formal or forensic way, then his response has no ontological bearing upon us but is an empty transaction over our heads.[24]

Torrance coins this lack of an ontological link the "Latin heresy," which considers the atonement in "juridical terms as a transaction between Christ and the rest of humanity."[25] His frustration is that "in Western Christianity the atonement tends to be interpreted almost exclusively in terms of external forensic relations as a juridical transaction in the transference of penalty for sin from the sinner to the sin-bearer."[26] This is not to say that Torrance denies the key components that make up Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA),[27] only that he feels that this is frequently communicated in a way that doesn't go far enough. Woznicki points out that Torrance's ire arises from the feeling that PSA is communicated as something external and transactional over and above humanity.[28] "Torrance's version of penal and substitutionary atonement has Christ stand as a substitute for humanity not because of a merely legal relation with humanity but because of an ontological bond with every human being."[29] Therefore, Torrance longs for both representation and substitution to be attributed to Christ in an overlapping and integrated way.[30]

Humanity's Response to Christ

For Christ's faith and vicarious humanity to be applied to humans is for humans to make Christ's life, death, and resurrection their own. Thus, Galatians 2:20 was of paramount importance for Torrance, and he was adamant that it should

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[24] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 40.

[25] Christopher Woznicki, "Torrance and Atonement," in *Thomas F. Torrance and Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis*, ed. Myk Habets and R. Lucas Stamps, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2023), 184.

[26] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 40.

[27] To see where Torrance affirms PSA see, Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 68–69, 154.

[28] For a description of Torrance's critique and affirmation of PSA see Woznicki, "Torrance and Atonement," 199–203.

[29] Ibid., 202.

[30] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 80–81; Colyer, *How to Read T.F. Torrance*, 112.

be understood as a subjective genitive, preferring the KJV's translation: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Torrance comments, "'The faith of the Son of God' is to be understood here not just as my faith in him, but as the faith of Christ himself, for it refers primarily to Christ's unswerving faithfulness, his vicarious and substitutionary faith which embraces and undergirds us, such that when we believe we must say with St. Paul 'not I but Christ' even in our act of faith."[31] Christian Kettler writes, "His faith is that which picks up our faltering, imperfect faith and believes in our place. This does not denigrate our faith, because it is only through his faith that we can believe."[32] Torrance rests this view of Christ's vicarious faith on the *katallage* (substitution) of Christ. He finds it ironic that evangelicals focus only on the cross in their view of Christ's substitution, when affirming its extension to his entire life would be "dynamite" for them.[33] Still, Torrance has been criticized for not having a place for man's response to Christ,[34] but this critique neglects the individual, personal actualizing that takes place in Christ's representative humanity:

> He [Christ] is the personalizing Person, and we are personalized persons. Thus, far from depersonalizing human being, or overriding the human person, the coming of Jesus Christ has the effect of personalizing human being in a profounder way than ever before.[35]

Reconsideration of the isolationist conception of personhood is needed at this point. Marty Folsom has argued that the common conception of "person" is as an individual who has relationships with others like that of a billiard ball bumping up against another. Instead, he feels "person" should be considered as onto-relations

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[31] Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today*, 31; Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 98.

[32] Christian D. Kettler, "'Jesus Christ Is Our Human Response to God:' Divine and Human Agency in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 212.

[33] Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today*, 30.

[34] John Webster, "T.F. Torrance, 1915–2007," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 4 (2008): 371.

[35] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 68.

whereby, personhood is impossible to conceive of outside of the relationships that one has with others, forming a web of mutually dependent interactions rather than the bumping together of individualized billiard balls.[36] When it comes to one's relationship with God, then, comes the opportunity of relating with one who exists in triune relationship and from whom all personhood is defined: "The relationship develops through what Torrance calls 'indwelling,'[37] referring to 'participating in the active life of Jesus,' by the Spirit who is at work in us. Our part includes a 'responsive, dynamic indwelling'[38] within God's life."[39] As "person" is understood within this framework of onto-relations, capturing the idea of being-in-relation, the human response to Christ within the framework of initiating a personal relationship with Christ moves from transactional to relational. Folsom writes the following:

> This transfer moves from 'my performance' to 'our relationship,' opening the way for authentic personal relating with Jesus, who is God and human. He mediates our relation, bringing the life of God to us and bringing us into the embrace of God's life of love.[40]

Thus, if God is the personalizing Person and humans are personalized persons, Christ's mediatorial work warrants further consideration:

> In Jesus Christ we have embodied in our humanity personalizing Person and personalized person in one and the same being, in whom the personalized person is brought to its fullest reality. Thus far from being emptied or overpowered by the divine Person, the human person

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[36] Marty Folsom, "Barth, Torrance, and Evangelicals: Critiquing and Reinvigorating the Idea of a 'Personal Relationship with Jesus,'" in *Thomas F. Torrance and Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis*, ed. Myk Habets and R. Lucas Stamps, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2023), 170.

[37] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, The Torrance Collection Theológos (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 49.

[38] Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality & Evangelical Theology: The Realism of Christian Revelation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 48.

[39] Folsom, "Barth, Torrance, and Evangelicals," 175.

[40] Ibid., 170.

is reinforced and upheld in its indissoluble oneness with the divine.[41]

Rather than displacing mankind's response to God, Christ's vicarious faith grounds and actualizes mankind's faith as they are brought into relationship with the one who is both the personalizing Person in his divinity and the true, holy personalized person in his humanity.

The faith between Christ and the believer consists in a polar relationship. Torrance describes this polarity whereby, "the primary pole is certainly God's faith or Christ's faith … but within the embrace of that relation the secondary pole is that of the believer, his responding faith."[42] To illustrate, Torrance speaks of teaching his daughter to walk. As they walked along, it was clear that she was not upheld by her feeble grasp of her father's hand but his firm clutch of her own. [43] "In other words," Geordie Ziegler writes, "our pole is not of ourselves but is a gift of God. The primary pole of the Christian life lies outside of ourselves. The primary pole is the humanity of the risen Christ."[44] Yet, the human pole still requires activity on the part of the individual, and Torrance affirms that there is still expectation that one responds to God's grace through confessing with their mouth that Jesus is Lord.[45]

4. The Evangelical Faith Crisis

Failure to allow Christ's faith to provide the anchor for our own assurance of salvation has resulted in a sense of anxiety among contemporary Evangelicals. Folsom writes, "Today, evangelical Christians see themselves as individuals who once did not have a relationship with God but decided to follow Jesus. Subtly, this focuses the relationship on the human decision."[46] Torrance calls this understanding

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[41] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 68.

[42] Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today*, 31–32.

[43] Ibid., 32.

[44] Geordie Ziegler, "Thinking and Acting in Christ: Torrance on Spiritual Formation," in *Thomas F. Torrance and Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis*, ed. Myk Habets and R. Lucas Stamps, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2023), 255–56.

[45] Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 156.

[46] Folsom, "Barth, Torrance, and Evangelicals," 165.

"a kind of subtle Pelagianism" since it leads people to rely on their own act of faith rather than Christ. He writes, "in far too much preaching of Christ the ultimate responsibility is taken off the shoulders of the Lamb of God and put upon the shoulders of the poor sinner, and he knows well in his heart that he cannot cope with it."[47]

Whose Shoulders Bear the Weight?

This inability to cope with the burden of salvation is well illustrated in the popular work *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved,* by J. D. Greear. Greear begins by noting how his own lack of assurance led to him being baptized four times.[48] Each baptism originiated from an anxiety that he was not truly sincere in his previous decision to follow Christ. Many in Evangelicalism can identify with Greear's concern for the authenticity of one's salvation, especially in the face of passages like Matthew 7:21–23 that describe Christ turning away those who thought they were believers.[49] However, it's important to consider his proposed solution to this salvific anxiety.

Greear begins well by highlighting how at his church they summarize the gospel in four words: "Jesus in my place."[50] He writes, "Jesus took our sin, suffering the full weight of its penalty. In return He offers to us His righteousness. When we are united to Christ, what is ours becomes His and what is His becomes ours."[51] Greear is driving home the substitutionary aspect of the gospel, but it's important to see how he frames the concept of *faith* because it captures the common evangelical view of the concept.

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[47] Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today*, 35.

[48] Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart*, 3.

[49] Accroding to a Barna study in 2017, 65% of evangelicals have experienced some form of doubt about their faith in God. Though 53% say that their faith became stronger, 7% say doubt weakened their faith and 12% confessed to losing their faith altogether. "Two-Thirds of Christians Face Doubt," Barna Group, July 25, 2017, https://www.barna.com/research/two-thirds-christians-face-doubt/.

[50] Ibid., 35.

[51] Ibid.

Greear argues that faith is "belief in action" and the object of faith is to be entirely in Christ Jesus.[52] Furthermore, he sees as problematic the approach to salvation as that of a ceremony where one says the right words — maybe the sinner's prayer — and "gets saved." If the ceremony is what brings assurance, then memory failure or lack of sincerity could bring into question the previous act of "asking Jesus into one's heart."[53] Greear sees a better way forward through encouraging believers to consider their heart's current posture: "If you are right now resting in His arms, knowing when you began to rest is less important than that you are doing it now. Your present posture is more important than past memory."[54] Here, the assurance of salvation is placed upon the shoulders of the individual, but Greear knows that only Christ brings about salvation and so he still seeks to assign the burden of salvation to Christ while still leaving place for man's responsibility. Therefore, he will assert on the one hand that "Salvation is a posture of repentance and faith toward the finished work of Christ in which you transfer the weight of your hopes of heaven off of your own righteousness and onto the finished work of Christ."[55] But on the other hand he states, "The way to know you made the decision is by the fact that you are resting in Christ now … The posture begins at a moment, but it persists for a lifetime."[56] Greear then asserts that when he doubts his own salvation he asks where his faith is currently located, if it is presently on Jesus then there is no need to look back further at the time when one made a decision.[57] The question, then, is whether one's current faith posture is a sufficient litmus test for one's eternal security?

Philip Cary, a Lutheran, says "no" in a review he wrote of Greear's work.[58] Cary acknowledges that Greear is appropriately reacting against the popular notion

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[52] Ibid., 40.

[53] Ibid., 41–42.

[54] Ibid., 42.

[55] Ibid., 43.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 47.

[58] Phillip Cary, "Review of *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart*," *Christianity Today* 57.2 (2013): 53–55.

of "once saved, always saved" that posits that one can make a decision for Christ and then live their life however they see fit. Cary places Greear in the Calvinistic tradition that says that a persevering faith will endure until the end, which means that believers will not point back to a decision but to their active abiding in Christ.

> This is helpful, but of course it does not solve every problem. It's always possible to worry whether your current posture really is one of faith and repentance — those two inseparable biblical requirements that Greear aptly summarizes as belief in the gospel and surrendering to the lordship of Christ. What if you have not repented and do not truly believe?"[59]

In other words, doubt can still creep into one's own current heart posture so long as the focus is on the self. Cary encourages readers to ask the following questions:

> How do I know that my current posture is going to last? I am sitting now, but is there any decision I now make that will guarantee I keep sitting? I am resting the weight of my soul on Jesus now, but how can I be sure that I will keep doing this until the end of my life?[60]

These questions point out the anxiety that can still remain for believers who follow Greear's method. Cary states that his own faith tradition of Lutheranism makes no such claim. Instead, true faith is revealed at the end as that which persevered, the current task of the believer is then to keep their eyes on Jesus and not their own faith. Calvinism, then, offers assurance of one's salvation, while Lutheranism makes no such offer but instead frees one from the burden of considering one's own faith. There is a cost with either tradition:

> What you get, for that price, is the freedom for faith to continue to "look outside itself" at Christ alone and not "back onto itself," not even for the sake of telling the difference between temporary and saving faith. What you lose is eternal security, the assurance that you are already saved for eternity. Every tradition has its distinctive anxieties,

[59] Ibid., 54.

[60] Ibid.

> the price it pays for its distinctive convictions. For my part, I go all the way with Luther, for I think Christian faith puts faith in Christ alone — and not even a little bit in itself. And I think we should pay any price for such faith.[61]

Cary has offered an either-or distinction in his portrayal of assurance. Either one can have it but be plagued by doubt of their faith's genuineness or not have it and keep their eyes on Christ. Torrance's doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ, however, seems to pave a *via media* through these two extremes. It provides assurance by consoling anxious sinners that their weak and faltering faith is united to Christ's enduring, salvific faith, while at the same time addressing Cary's concern of making Christ the primary Object of one's faith as the believer's faith is polarized with Christ's, resulting in an onto-relationship of objective assurance.

Greear himself has a place for Christ's vicarious faith and repentance when considering Jesus's baptism. For those who worry whether or not their repentance was good enough, Greear points to Christ's baptism as a vicarious baptism of repentance for those who trust in him. Greear writes the following that seems very similar to Torrance's doctrine of Christ's vicarious humanity:

> He [Jesus] was undergoing a baptism of repentance in my place, repenting in a way that could truly be called 'righteous,' so that his death could be a perfect substitute for mine. He lived the life I should have lived. All of it, He did everything perfectly in my place. So the good news for me is that I don't have to repent *perfectly*, because He did so for me.[62]

With Greear, Torrance sees Christ's baptism as a vicarious act of repentance because even the repentance with which humanity repents is tainted by sin, and so a perfect repentance was required.[63] Therefore, the fear of one's faltering faith is removed. "Since a conversion in that truly evangelical sense is a turning away from ourselves to Christ, it calls for a conversion from our in-turned notions of

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[61] Ibid., 55.

[62] Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart*, 72.

[63] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 85.

conversion to one which is grounded and sustained in Christ Jesus himself."[64] There is no need to worry about the sincerity of one's personal decision when it is Christ's repentance that is credited to humanity through representation and substitution. How, then, should this view of repentance impact preaching?

5. Torrance and Evangelism

Failure to accurately preach the Gospel will corrupt its message of good news for the sinner:

> The Gospel is to be proclaimed in such a way that full place is given to the man Jesus in his Person and Work as the Mediator between God and man, otherwise it is not being proclaimed in a way that corresponds with its actual message of unconditional grace and reconciling exchange.[65]

Preaching with this focus is not easy, for it must be done in a way "that we do not throw people back upon themselves in autonomous acts of personal repentance and decision, or encourage them to come to Christ for their own sake rather than for Christ's sake."[66] To preach in this way would be *unevangelistic*. Unevangelical preaching occurs when preachers state that believers will not be saved unless they put their trust in Christ or give their heart to him. Colyer writes, "The gospel has to be proclaimed in a way that does not make Christ's redeeming activity on our behalf dependent on *our* activity of repentance, decision, and faith."[67] The difference between evangelical and unevangelical preaching is located in effectively how one communicates grace. In unevangelical preaching "what is actually coming across to people is not a Gospel of unconditional grace but some other Gospel of conditional grace which belies the essential nature and content of the Gospel as it is in Jesus."[68]

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[64] Ibid., 86.

[65] Ibid., 92.

[66] Ibid., 93.

[67] Colyer, *How to Read T.F. Torrance*, 116.

[68] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 93.

Torrance sees the solution to unevangelistic preaching in preaching the vicarious humanity of Christ, for it is here that unconditional grace can be offered.[69] Thus, the only response is one of reception and thanksgiving.[70] Yet, Colyer notes that Torrance's understanding of unconditional grace can be difficult for Evangelicals, thinking that there is no longer a place for human agency. He argues that one must move away from understanding divine and human agency in a *logical* way.[71] Torrance sees the inter-working of these two things as "a miracle of the Spirit, and is ultimately as inexplicable as the miracle of the Virgin Birth of Jesus which for me is the unique God-given pattern of unconditional grace."[72] Preachers have long struggled to describe this interworking as well. Jim Shaddix, in his work *Decisional Preaching*, calls on expositors to create a space for hearers to respond to the preached work.[73] Yet, he too wrestles with the inability of hearers to respond to the Gospel without Christ's supernatural work on their hearts since they are incapable of choosing Christ on their own.[74] At the same time, he does not feel these two things need to be reconciled since Spurgeon did not either, who wrote:

> I never reconcile two friends, never. These two doctrines are friends with one another; for they are both in God's Word, and I shall not attempt to reconcile them. If you show me that they are enemies, then I will reconcile them.[75]

For Torrance, rather than removing human agency, the substitutionary life and death of Christ actualizes human agency. He writes:

> All through the incarnate life and activity of the Lord Jesus we are shown that 'all of grace' does not mean 'nothing of man', but precisely

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[69] Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today*, 94.

[70] Kettler, "Torrance's View of Divine and Human Agency," 216.

[71] Colyer, *How to Read T.F. Torrance*, 118.

[72] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, xii.

[73] Jim Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching* (Spring Hill: Rainer Publishing, 2019).

[74] Ibid., 21.

[75] Charles H. Spurgeon, "Jacob and Esau," in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 5 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1859), 120.

> the opposite: *all of grace means all of man*, for the fullness of grace creatively includes the fullness and completeness of our human response in the equation."[76]

Furthermore, to dismiss logic in understanding divine and human agency is not to declare the relationship of the two as irrational.[77]

> Logically 'all of grace' would mean 'nothing of man,' which may tempt people to apportion the role of Christ and of the believer by arguing for 'something of grace' and 'something of man,' something done *for me* by Christ and something I do *for myself*. *All* of grace means *all* of man![78]

6. How to Preach the Vicarious Humanity of Christ

In light of the theological elements of Christ's vicarious humanity and faith, there remains the question of how one is to faithfully communicate this doctrine without doing so unevangelistically. A common element among Evangelical preaching is the presence of a call for response after the sermon. Torrance offers an example of what this call for response could look like:

> God loves you so utterly and completely that he has given himself for you in Jesus Christ his beloved Son, and has thereby pledged his very Being as God for your salvation. In Jesus Christ God has actualized his unconditional love for you in your human nature in such a once for all way, that he cannot go back upon it without undoing the Incarnation and the Cross and thereby denying himself. Jesus Christ died for you precisely because you are sinful and utterly unworthy of him, and has thereby already made you his own before and apart from your ever believing in him. He has bound you to himself by his love in a way that he will never let you go, for even if you refuse him and damn yourself in hell his love will never cease. Therefore, repent and believe in Jesus

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[76] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, xii.

[77] Colyer, *How to Read T.F. Torrance*, 120.

[78] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, xii.

> Christ as your Lord and Saviour. From beginning to end what Jesus Christ has done for you he has done not only as God but as man. He has acted in your place in the whole range of your human life and activity, including your personal decisions, and your responses to God's love, and even your acts of faith. He has believed for you, fulfilled your human response to God, even made your personal decision for you, so that he acknowledges you before God as one who has already responded to God in him, who has already believed in God through him, and whose personal decision is already implicated in Christ's self-offering to the Father, in all of which he has been fully and completely accepted by the Father, so that in Jesus Christ you are already accepted by him. Therefore, renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.[79]

It was within the preaching of Billy Graham that Torrance found a model for the sort of Christocentric preaching he was seeking. Graham's preaching "directed people to Christ and to Christ alone as Lord and Savior, in such a direct and blunt way" so that they were "challenged by the gospel and turned in their utter helplessness to Christ Jesus, to find in him one who has wholly taken their place so that they might freely be given his place."[80]

Therefore, homileticians should consider how they offer the free gift of salvation so that their listeners are not thrown back onto their own decision, while at the same time still offering the opportunity for listers to respond to the Gospel. In fact, Habets argues that calling for a decision was a key element of Torrance's own preaching.[81] Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix offer six pragmatic suggestions for

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[79] Ibid., 94.

[80] Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today*, 38.

[81] Myk Habets, "*Theologia Is Eusebeia*: Thomas F. Torrance's Church Homiletics," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul D. Molnar and Myk Habets (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 270.

facilitating a good call for response, which can offer a helpful grid for applying Torrance's vicarious humanity of Christ.[82]

Six Suggestions for Offering a Call for Response in Preaching

First, the call is to be cohesive with one's sermon, because these calls can at times become overly routine or disjointed from the sermon's focus. Calls for response that do not flow naturally from the sermon's topic, such as calling for people to receive Christ for the first time after preaching on the Christian life, should be avoided.[83] Torrance modelled this by typically concluding with a summary application that fit with the expository thrust of his sermon.[84]

Second, Vines and Shaddix assert that the call should be simple and clear.[85] Habets notes that clarity of expression was one of the key themes of Torrance's preaching and that he would "not include any excessive technical theological vocabulary."[86] This restraint may come as a surprise due to his theological depth, but Torrance was keen on providing simplicity and clarity for his listeners, which was one of the things he appreciated about Graham's preaching as well.[87] Clarity is incredibly important for a call for response after preaching: "Your listeners should be told exactly what they're being asked to do, why they're being asked to do it, and what will take place when they do it."[88] Habets notes the following elements in Torrance's preaching:

> The applicatory nature of the sermons is a striking feature: Torrance's directness in appealing to his congregants to repent, to believe, to offer worship, to give, to love, to enjoy God's creation, to act rightly, and all manner of other godly activities, but most of all, the invitation

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[82] Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*, Rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017), 383–385.

[83] Ibid., 383.

[84] Habets, "Thomas F. Torrance's Church Homiletics," 267.

[85] Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 383.

[86] Habets, "Thomas F. Torrance's Church Homiletics," 268.

[87] Torrance, *Preaching Christ Today*, 38.

[88] Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 383–84.

> for every man, woman, and child to participate in the life of God in Jesus Christ by means of the Holy Spirit.[89]

Torrance's emphasis on application in his sermons show that his theologica commitment to the vicarious humanity of Christ did not result in human passivity. There are still expectations and invitations for his people to obey and live in light of the text of Scripture.

As a part of the need for clarity in a call for response, Vines and Shaddix encourage preachers to "avoid giving the impression that 'walking an aisle' is synonymous with a commitment to Christ."[90] Torrance calls this "the modern notion of salvation by *existential decision*, in which we interpose ourselves, with our faith and our decision, in the place of Christ and His objective decision on our behalf."[91] Salvation by existential decision has been discussed extensively above, as well as its effect of equating assurance of salvation with the genuineness of one's decision for Christ. Instead, Torrance insists that the message of the New Testament is that

> God loves us, that He has given His only Son to be our Saviour, that Christ has died for us when we were yet sinners, and that His work is finished, and *therefore* it calls for repentance and obedience of faith, but never does it say: This is what God in Christ has done for you, and you can be saved on condition that you repent and believe.[92]

Third, the call for response should be neither manipulative nor threatening. "Potential respondents should not be coerced, pressured, or made to feel guilty during the moment of decision."[93] In other words, the Gospel should be *good news* for the sinner, on account of Christ's finished work of salvation, so that they "do not

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[89] Habets, "Thomas F. Torrance's Church Homiletics," 270.

[90] Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 384.

[91] Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 58.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 384.

need to do anything to complete it but only to receive it gratefully."[94] Jenny Richards's distinction between covenantal and contractual love is helpful here:

> A covenantal understanding is grounded in unconditional love and emphasizes the person and work of Christ; whereas a contractual, dualist understanding is grounded in legalistic, abstracted, performative actions of our own which try to condition God into loving us, or at best into continuing to accept us — an outworking of legal repentance.[95]

A legalistic, contractual understanding of love can lead to a response to the Gospel motivated by guilt rather than grace. Homiletician Bryan Chapell notes the following:

> This proper expression of gratitude is not a warped sense of trying to repay God the eternal debt of our sin with more filthy rags from hands stained with Christ's blood, but the sincere desire to demonstrate our love, thanksgiving, and appreciation for grace freely offered through the Lamb sacrificed once for all.[96]

For Chapell, it is only grace that can result in lasting change for people — never guilt. Therefore, rather than manipulating or threatening people to respond to the Gospel, the vicarious humanity of Christ encourages the listener to respond in joyful repentance and acceptance of Christ's finished work.

Fourth, the call for response should be personal to every listener. "Each individual ought to feel like the speaker is talking specifically to him or her."[97] Though Torrance believed that Christ died for all on account of his vicarious humanity, he also maintained that every individual had a responsibility to respond

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[94] Kettler, "Torrance's View of Divine and Human Agency," 213.

[95] Jenny Richards, "'Seeking Love, Justice and Freedom for All:' Using the Work of T.F. and J.B. Torrance to Address Domestic and Family Violence," in *Thomas F. Torrance and Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis*, ed. Myk Habets and R. Lucas Stamps, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2023), 272.

[96] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 302.

[97] Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 384.

to the Gospel. For example, in a published sermon on John 3:20, Torrance interpreted Jesus's words of standing at the door and knocking as addressed to the church; however, "they are also meant to be heard by the individual. Each of us may hear Jesus knocking on the door of his heart, and to each Jesus wants to say: 'My son, my daughter, your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.'"[98]

Fifth, the call of response includes an evangelistic invitation. "All Bible preaching issues forth into evangelism. Regardless of the specific Bible content of your message, your call for response should include an evangelistic appeal."[99] Though it's unclear whether Torrance would assert that every sermon *must* have an evangelistic thrust, he certainly was no stranger to offering an evangelistic appeal in his preaching.[100] In terms of communicating the vicarious humanity of Christ as a part of an evangelistic portion of a call for response, one could refer back to the example quoted at length at the beginning of this section.

The sixth and final quality of a good call for response that Vines and Shaddix note is that the call should have a functional plan. "When people respond, you should have a good plan in place to come alongside them."[101] Though Vines and Shaddix primarily have in view pragmatic elements like considering who could serve as counselors for those who come forward, Torrance also sees the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist as helpful elements for moving the believer's focus off of themselves and onto Christ's free gift of himself.[102]

> So far as the proclamation of the Gospel is concerned the Sacraments tell us that even when we respond to its call for repentance and faith, it is nevertheless not on our repentance and faith that we must rely but solely on that which Christ has already done and continues to do,

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[98] Thomas F. Torrance, "Christ in the Midst of His Church," in *When Christ Comes and Comes Again*, The Torrance Collection (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 30.

[99] Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 385.

[100] For an example of just a few see Torrance, "Christ in the Midst of His Church," 21, 30, 38, 44.

[101] Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 385.

[102] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 96–97.

freely made available for us in and through the Sacraments.[103]

7. Conclusion

Preaching the faith of Christ as a part of his vicarious humanity may seem difficult and perhaps foreign to many Evangelical preachers, but clearly articulated, it can begin to address the faulty conception of faith and assurance that is prevalent among those who conceived of their salvation as founded upon their own existential decision. Instead, it is Christ's decision on the believer's behalf that grounds their faith — his decision to assume fallen flesh and, in doing so, sanctify it through forming ontological, hypostatic union between God and humanity, and his decision to live a life vicariously as both representative and substitute for all humanity. Therefore, dualistic and deistic patterns of thought have been removed as humanity can now participate in Christ through relationship with him, no longer fearing that their salvation might be lost, for it was never theirs to earn to begin with, only receive as a gift in repentance and faith.

[103] Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 159.

Paul Louis Metzger, "The Existential Significance of T. F. Torrance's Christocentric Theology for Pastoral and Palliative Care," *Participatio* 12: "The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance" (2024), 71-92; #2024-PLM-1. CC-by-nc-sa.

THE EXISTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF T. F. TORRANCE'S CHRISTOCENTRIC THEOLOGY FOR PASTORAL AND PALLIATIVE CARE

Paul Louis Metzger, Ph.D.

Professor, Christian Theology & Theology of Culture

Director, The Institute for Cultural Engagement: New Wine, New Wineskins

Multnomah Biblical Seminary, Jessup University

pmetzger@jessup.edu

Abstract: *Contrary to popular opinion, rigorous theology should and can prove beneficial for practical theology and pastoral ministry. This essay claims that Thomas F. Torrance's Christocentric and Trinitarian theological enterprise provides a fitting template for such theological-pastoral integration. More specifically, Torrance's dynamic, scholarly analysis involving such emphases as Jesus' vicarious humanity and high priestly ministry made present to us through the Spirit, and human participation in the life of the triune God, affords vital resources for ministers providing pastoral care to the seriously injured, critically ill, and dying. The symbiotic relation of Torrance's work as a military chaplain during World War II with his mature, dynamic, and resilient theological reflections offers a fitting exemplar for those engaged in pastoral theology and chaplaincy ministry. The article highlights the tangible theological significance of Torrance's in-depth pastoral theological offerings, as the author provides holistic care for his minimally conscious adult son who endured a catastrophic brain injury. The same model can prove promising for pastors and chaplains operating in other critical care settings.*

1. Introduction

Proper consideration of Thomas F. Torrance's legacy must account for the practical import of his rigorous, scholarly reflections. This essay highlights the existential significance of Torrance's Christocentric and Trinitarian theology for pastoral and chaplaincy work in supporting people in critical care situations of various kinds. The dynamic, living reality of Jesus Christ, the ascended Lord, who is present to us by God's Spirit, generates an invigorating and critically important feature, what Andrew Purves refers to as a "kinetic quality," for practical theological reflection.[1] This Christological and Trinitarian perspective, which involves consideration of Jesus' vicarious humanity and our participation in the triune God's life, bears upon pastoral care. Jesus is the "wounded healer" in the community of faith and in its chaplaincy work amid the gravely injured and severely ill, as well as among those who are dying. Torrance's work as a chaplain exemplified a robust and rich, empathic Christocentric quality, which is embedded in his mature theological reflections. The article will begin with consideration of Torrance's work as a military chaplain during wartime. It will turn to consider how his work as a chaplain in highlighting the centrality of Jesus Christ and its kinetic quality for pastoral care is on full display in his theological enterprise. The essay will conclude with how this singular pastoral-theological orientation, which Torrance's work exemplifies, has proven to be life-giving in my own ministry, and can prove cathartic and catalytic for others in pastoral care. Drawing from Torrance and others, I will reflect upon the kinetic, even kenotic, cruciform quality of Jesus' high priestly ministry and its bearing on my theological development while caring for my now minimally conscious, adult son who suffered a catastrophic brain injury in 2021. The hope is that this perspective will benefit others in pastoral and palliative care in service to Jesus, the seriously ill, critically injured, gravely sick, and dying.

[1] Andrew Purves, "The Shape of Torrance Theology," *Theology in Scotland* 16 (2009): 23.

2. More Than "Paper Theology": Christocentric Reflections for Pastoral Care

Torrance's theology is Christocentric and arises from existential considerations. There is a pastoral quality to his reflections. No doubt, his work as a chaplain during World War II served as a catalyst, shaping and enriching his theology in this pastoral direction. Daniel Cameron refers to deeply impactful encounters Torrance had on the battlefield and with dying soldiers:

> At one point his platoon came under heavy German fire and only he and one other soldier made it out alive. These experiences and questions from dying soldiers, such as "Is God really like Jesus?" made him realize the importance of the centrality of Jesus in Christian theology. He became convinced that it is this facet of Christian theology that is the driving force behind the recovery of the church's identity and mission.[2]

Elmer Colyer also reflects upon Torrance's experiences as a military chaplain during the war and the import for his theology: "Experiences like these crystallized for Torrance that Christian theology has to be able to ground one's existence amidst the most acute moments of life and death. Torrance later called theologies without this kind of existential depth 'paper theology' — interesting reading, but inadequate for living and dying."[3]

These statements leap off the page and highlight important pastoral theological values. First, theology that is more than the paper on a page or a paper weight will have existential depth. The ink never really dries. It drips with the secretions, sweat, tears, and blood of the most critical experiences in life and death. Theology must guard against featuring the esoteric, abstract, atemporal, and

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[2] Daniel J. Cameron, "Thomas Forsyth Torrance: Ecumenical Theologian," *Christianity Today* (December 2, 2017), https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/thomas-forsyth-tf-torrance.html.

[3] Elmer Colyer, *How to Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 42.

amorphous. Everyday life, including life in the margins and at death's door, must be central to its concerns.

Second, the subject matter of theology must prove a fitting complement to our experiences and be able to ground and support them. Just as the theologian's reflections must arise from and account for everyday life, including critical care situations, the subject matter must show evidence of empathic care and will feature consideration of common, concrete, temporal, and flesh and blood reality. Such subject matter provides a secure basis from which to engage and operate so that the theologian does not utter empty, lifeless, comfortless words in crisis situations.

Third, Jesus is the supreme subject who alone proves sufficient as the secure basis for theology to address our existential need as God's living, embodied Word. Similarly, he is our embodied response to God's living declaration of favor toward us. In keeping with the Nicene Creed and the homoousion, Jesus is the mediator between God and humanity and thereby the proper vantage point for sound reflection on *both* God *and* humanity.

The dying soldiers' existential question, "Is God really like Jesus?" led Torrance to realize that Jesus is central to the theological enterprise, shaping his concept of revelation. For Torrance, following Barth, God is *not* hidden *behind* Jesus. For Barth, God is hidden *in* revelation.[4] Torrance reasons: "The *homoousion* asserts that God *is* eternally in himself what he *is* in Jesus Christ, and, therefore, that there is no dark unknown God behind the back of Jesus Christ, but only he who is made known to us in Jesus Christ."[5] Far more than print on a page, he is God's flesh and blood Word to us.

There is more, though. Jesus is also our embodied word that leaps off the page of the New Testament as the fitting response to God's declaration of favor in

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[4] Barth maintains that God is hidden *in* revelation and revealed *in* hiddenness. The *deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus* are one in him. God reveals himself in hiddenness and hides himself in revelation. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, *The Doctrine of God*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 199, 343; Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*: *Instruction in the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 136–141.

[5] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 135.

him. Torrance unpacks this dual notion of Jesus as God's Word to us and our word to God in *The Mediation of Christ*. Torrance goes so far as to say the humanity of Jesus Christ is the actual text of New Testament revelation:

> *The real text* of the New Testament revelation is *the humanity of Jesus.* As we read the Old Testament and read the New Testament and listen to the Word of God, the real text is not the documents of the Pentateuch, the Psalms or the Prophets of the documents of the Gospels and the Epistles, but in and through them all the Word of God struggling with rebellious human existence in Israel on the way to becoming incarnate, and then that Word translated into the flesh and blood and mind and life of a human being in Jesus, in whom we have both the Word of God become man and the perfect response of man to God offered on our behalf. As the real text of God's Word addressed to us, Jesus is also the real text of our address to God. We have no speech or language with which to address God, but the speech and language called Jesus Christ. In him our humanity, our human understanding, our human word are taken up, purified and sanctified, and addressed to God the Father for us as our very own — and that is the word of man with which God is well pleased.[6]

What we see in Jesus is what we get with God. As the incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended, and returning Lord, we have confidence in his identification with us in life and death and victory for us. What we see in Jesus is also what we get with humanity as he mediates us to God as our great high priest. We have assurance in life and death that God really is like Jesus and that we are really like him through our union in the Spirit. And so, we can answer an adjacent question to that of dying soldiers in the affirmative: "Are we really like Jesus?" We have assurance in life and death that he takes up our heart cry and purifies our plea for divine favor as pleasing to God in his "vicarious repentance" bound up with his vicarious humanity.[7]

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[6] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard Publishers, 1992), 78–79.

[7] Ibid., 85.

Fourth, unlike paper theology, Jesus — as the living, embodied, cruciform, resurrected, and ascended Word — is both dynamic and indestructible. The wise and discerning physician of the soul gives himself to us without being lost in the process. As one palliative care specialist and medical ethicist, Robert Lyman Potter, shared, physicians must be "technological wizards" and "empathic care guides,"[8] remaining distinct and objective but fully engaged with compassion in treating the patient in their vulnerable situation. So, it is with Jesus and the church.

Jesus's incarnation reveals that God does not remain aloof, refusing to intervene in human affairs as "immutable and changeless." We also perceive in the incarnation that Jesus is not "detached and separated from" God "and therefore mutable and changeable."[9] We find that Jesus became like us in every way, yet without sin, and without ceasing to be God. Jesus assumed our fallen human condition in contrast to an ideal, pristine, human state. However, our crisis did not subsume and overwhelm him. As Torrance writes, Jesus:

> took upon himself our twisted, lost, and damned existence, with all its wickedness, violence, and abject misery, and substituted himself for us in the deepest and darkest depths of our perdition and godlessness, all in order to save and redeem us through the atoning sacrifice of himself.[10]

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[8] Robert Lyman Potter, "End-of-Life Care: Wounded Healers," in *Maximize — Don't Marginalize*, A New Wine, New Wineskins Conference, Portland, Oregon, Week 2, Thursday, April 20, 2022; https://www.new-wineskins.org/event/maximize-dont-marginalize-end-of-life-care/. Robert Lyman Potter, MD, PhD, is Senior Scholar Emeritus for the OHSU Center for Healthcare Ethics, Portland, OR.

[9] Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 261.

[10] Thomas F. Torrance, "The Atonement, the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. N.M. de S. Cameron (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 236–237.

The eternal Son, who in cooperation with the divine Spirit, offers himself up in humble, sinless obedience in his solidarity with us. In this way, he assumes our fallen humanity to heal it and make us whole.[11]

We observe here in these various reflections a kinetic or dynamic and resilient or durable quality to Torrance's theology. We now turn to highlight in greater detail this kinetic feature. Far beyond paper theology, it will be shown to have profound import for pastoral care.

3. More Than Timeless and Faceless Logic: A Kinetic Method for Pastoral Care

Andrew Purves reflects upon the kinetic quality of Torrance's theological work and quotes from *Theological Science*:

> His work, rather, had a kinetic quality that was appropriate to its subject, the living, acting, and reigning Lord. "Real theological thinking," he wrote in *Theological Science*, "is thus alive and on the move under the control of the Truth that makes it free from imprisonment in timeless logical connections." Later in the same book, he wrote that "the living Truth requires a *kinetic* mode of knowledge and thought." For Torrance, theology is on the move because it is knowledge of God in, through, and as Jesus Christ. There are no fixed or anchoring points independent of Jesus Christ to which theology might appeal or that might restrict appropriate movement….[12]

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[11] Torrance discusses this subject in various places. See for example Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 39; and Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ: Auburn Lectures 1938–39* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 121. Refer to the following treatment of an important pneumatological emphasis intended to clarify and support Torrance's position on the *non assumptus* for which I account above: Myk Habets, "The Fallen Humanity of Christ: A Pneumatological Clarification of the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance," *Participatio* 5 (2015): 18–44, especially 43–44.

[12] Andrew Purves, "The Shape of Torrance Theology," 23. The quotations from Torrance are found in Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 154, 209.

We will return to Purves' article later in this section. For now, it is important to note that Jesus is the north star of theological work. It follows that he serves as the compass for pastoral theology and pastoral ethics. The incarnate logos who serves as the mediator between God and humanity addresses people in their life settings through his timely operations.

Torrance's work emphasizes Jesus Christ as the humanizing human and personalizing person.[13] No deontological construct, utilitarian consequence, or habitual virtuous characteristic has the final word in such domains as pastoral and palliative care. Given that Jesus addresses human persons face to face in space and time situations, we must follow suit. All theological, pastoral, and ethical considerations must account for the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Lord, who comes to us through the Holy Spirit. He is the ontic and epistemic ground for all such considerations. He is God's eternal and timely Word who addresses us fittingly in our hour of need.

As the eternal Word who is incarnate, he breaks through the divide between timeless logic and the temporal situation. As the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord, he unites time and eternity in his person. And so, he is by no means a distant human figure locked up in the historical past. There is no "ugly ditch" of history.[14]

Now if it weren't for the resurrection and oft-neglected doctrine of the ascension,[15] one might have to accept an insurmountable ugly ditch in history that separates Jesus from us today. But Jesus' vicarious activity was not limited to his time on earth. The great resurrected and ascended High Priest and life-giving Spirit bridge the gap between time and eternity and intercede for us daily. Jesus' entire life work from past to present is vicarious, including his repentance on our behalf and resurrection of our healed human nature in the integrity of his whole person as

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[13] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 47–49, 67–72.

[14] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in *Lessing's Theological Writings* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1957), 51-55.

[15] Refer to David Fergusson's account of the ascension's neglect in modern theology in "The Ascension of Christ: Its Significance in the Theology of T.F. Torrance," *Participatio* 3 (2012): 93–94.

the firstborn.[16] The same is true of the ongoing operations of the eternal and indwelling Spirit who works in tandem with Jesus. Regarding the Spirit's vicarious activity, Torrance writes, God's Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, "intervenes in vicarious intercession on our behalf and pours out the love of God into our hearts."[17] Torrance writes about their joint activity of Ascension and Pentecost:

> It is as our Brother, wearing our humanity, that he has ascended, presenting himself eternally before the face of the Father, and presenting us in himself. As such he is not only our word to God but God's Word to us. Toward God he is our Advocate and High Priest, but toward man he is the acceptance of us in himself. The very Spirit through whom he offered himself eternally to the Father he has sent down upon us in his High-Priestly blessing, fulfilling in the life of his Church on earth that which he has fulfilled in the heavenlies.[18]

Jesus eternally serves as our pastoral, high priestly advocate. Similarly, the Spirit advocates for us. Together they intercede on our behalf.

Paul writes about Jesus' intercession on our behalf in the Epistle to the Romans:

> Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in

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[16] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 85.

[17] Ibid., 109–110.

[18] Thomas F. Torrance, *Royal Ministry: A Theology of Ordained Ministry* (London: Continuum, 1993), 14–15.

Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:34-39; NRSV).

Earlier in this same passage, the Apostle writes about the Spirit's unique intercessory work: "the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27; NRSV).

Further to the dying soldiers' question, "Is God really like Jesus?" for which the answer is "Yes," one can again expect a favorable response to the question, "Are we really like Jesus?" "Yes," not because of moral gymnastics on our part, but Jesus' vicarious elevation of us through the Spirit. "Yes," not because of some formulaic prayer we offer, but based on Jesus' eternal advocacy and the Spirit's equally vicarious activity and unceasing intercession involving mysterious groans that God alone comprehends.

We now return to Purves' article where he reflects upon this same kinetic mode of theological thinking in keeping with God's activity. Jesus is "the mediating center of revelation."[19] For Torrance, as stated earlier, God really is made known to us *in Jesus*. God is *not behind* Jesus' back, as if there were some "dark unknown,"[20] or operating according to a timeless logic.[21] As is true of Barth's theology, "God is greater than what he is in revelation, though not different from it."[22]

Moreover, God does *not operate above* Jesus, or *above* us, but *within* humanity as one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. Purves points out that for Torrance, "atonement takes place within Jesus Christ, in the ontological depths of his incarnate life in such a way that the incarnation itself is essentially

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[19] Purves, "The Shape of Torrance Theology," 26.

[20] Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 135.

[21] Purves, "The Shape of Torrance Theology," 154.

[22] Paul Louis Metzger, "The Gospel of True Prosperity: Our Best Life in the Triune God Now and Not Yet," in *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Michael T. Dempsey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 285.

redemptive."[23] Purves later asserts: "Redemption through the atoning exchange is not accomplished by divine *fiat*, or by some transaction conducted above our heads, but by a real incarnation into the heart of our humanity to save us from within and from below by an act of love and grace. In this way too we see the kinetic 'shape' of Torrance's theology."[24]

Lastly, in keeping with the kinetic quality of revelation and reconciliation, there is a kinetic quality to our union with Christ in the Spirit. We are *not props* on a stage or independent agents, but *vital participants* in Jesus' ongoing mission through the Spirit in history. The church does *not extend* Christ or operate in place of him but participates in his ongoing vicarious human activity as our ascended High Priest with and through the Spirit of Pentecost in history. Purves puts it this way. For Torrance, "The ministry of the church is not another ministry, different from the ministry of Christ or separate from it but takes its essential form and content from the servant-existence and mission of Jesus. The mission of the church is not an extension of the mission of Jesus but is a sharing in the mission of Jesus."[25]

Torrance's theology has a bearing on pastoral care for those experiencing various maladies and critical care situations, not unlike those dying soldiers. Pastors and chaplains can provide confident and empathic assurance that God really is like Jesus. They can provide comfort to the downtrodden, the critically ill, and dying that God does not hover above them, but gets down on eye level, and identifies with them in their struggle through Jesus. His robust, vicarious faithfulness secures them and fosters *resilient faith*. Moreover, pastors and chaplains can encourage the downcast that God in Christ breaks into our situation and addresses our condition beyond timeless and faceless logic. His actuality makes all things possible, offering *realistic hope*. Lastly, they participate in Jesus' and the Spirit's ongoing vicarious work. They respond to the divine outpouring of divine affection whereby it becomes

[23] Purves, "The Shape of Torrance Theology," 27.

[24] Ibid., 29.

[25] Ibid., 34.

resounding love that reverberates in their engagement with others. To this threefold subject of faith, hope, and love, we now turn.

4. More Than Minimal Consciousness: Mindful of Personalist Ethics in Palliative Care

"Is God really like Jesus?" My answer to this question has a significant bearing on how I approach my adult son Christopher's catastrophic brain injury in January 2021 and its unceasing aftermath, including his minimally conscious state. The following life and blood theological reflections extend consideration of Torrance's kinetic theology far beyond the pale of paper dogmatics and pulp fiction.

First, I will reflect upon *resilient faith*, namely how Jesus' vicarious humanity in the Spirit grounds us in faith and worship even when we experience trauma and feel abandoned by God at the margins of vulnerable human existence in the shadow of death. Second, I will account for how a personalist framework in palliative care resonates with and extends Torrance's emphasis on the logic of Jesus as God's incarnate Word. His actuality as God's personal and particular Word and logic frames all probabilities and possibilities in attending to people with various significant health struggles and those in critical care situations, including my son. I refer to this theme as *realistic hope.* Third, I will conclude by considering how the church participates in Jesus' life-giving love through the Spirit in which he humanizes humans as the personalizing person. I refer to this feature as *resounding love*.

Resilient Faith

First, we must account for Jesus' faithful identification with us in his vicarious humanity in palliative care situations. Jesus fully embraces our human condition, including all the suffering, doubt, and fear that we experience in the shadow of death. He operates with resilient faith that makes our own faith possible. Even when we are not conscious, or only minimally conscious, of God's abiding care, God remains completely conscious, empathically engaged, and faithful to us at the margins of human existence.

As stated earlier, there is no "dark unknown" to God behind Jesus. Still, we do at times experience severe doubt, disbelief, and anxiety at the margins of temporal existence, overcome by deafening silence and dreaded shadows, or what in another context St. John of the Cross calls the "dark night of the soul."[26] Jesus enters our situation and immerses himself in what Torrance calls "the abysmal chasm that separates sinful man from God" and the "atheistical shout of abandonment and desolation." And yet, far from giving into our desolation and despair, Jesus turns it "into a prayer of commitment and trust." Torrance makes this point while reflecting on the God-despairing outlook among Jewish people in Israel who had endured the horrors of the Holocaust. Here is the larger context:

> I felt that the terrible cry of Jesus on the Cross was meant for them: *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?* "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That was a cry of utter God-forsakenness, the despairing cry of man in his dereliction which Jesus had made his own, taking it over from the twenty-second Psalm, thereby revealing that he had penetrated into the ultimate horror of great darkness, the abysmal chasm that separates sinful man from God. But there in the depths where we are exposed to the final judgments of God, Jesus converted man's atheistical shout of abandonment and desolation into a prayer of commitment and trust, "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit." The Son and the Father were one and not divided, each dwelling in the other, even in that 'hour and power of darkness' when Jesus was smitten of God and afflicted and pierced for our transgressions. In Jesus God himself descended to the very bottom of our human existence where we are alienated and antagonistic, into the very hell of our godlessness and despair, laying fast hold of us and taking our cursed condition upon himself, in order to embrace us forever in his reconciling love.[27]

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[26] See St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD and Otilio Rodríguez, OCD, rev. ed. (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991).

[27] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 52–53.

Jesus does not abandon us in our abandonment of God. He is there amid the destitution and alienation in various health crises and critical care situations. He will not let us go, praying for us as one of us, so that we might experience the fullness of God's love. His faithfulness and devout obedience in taking up and reorienting our cry of dereliction sustains us and makes it possible to believe again. As Purves claims, our "participation in Christ's mediation of our human response to God" entails "faith, worship, and service."[28] Jesus keeps the faith for us and worships God in total trust and obedience amid "the ultimate horror of great darkness"[29] at Golgotha and in the grave. Rather than condemn people for their atheism and agnosticism, we realize that his cry of dereliction followed by obedience was intended for them in the hope that they might experience his love and in turn respond in total confidence and adoration. Jesus' vicarious human activity is the ontic ground who makes it possible through the Spirit's own vicarious work to help us move beyond wrestling *from* God to wrestling *with* and *for* and *in* God.

Jesus' vicarious work on our behalf and in which we participate respects rather than discounts our suffering, makes space for lament rather than bypass it, and promotes Jesus' faithfulness rather than demeans us for our seemingly insufficient faith in crisis situations. It is a dereliction of Christian duty to tell others to "get over it" when they grieve in the face of intense suffering and personal loss. It is a distortion of Christian devotion to foster a paper theology and liturgy of celebration that makes little to no space for lament.[30] It is a deprivation of human dignity to pressure others into thinking that the reason their loved one does not get better, or dies, is because they lack faith.

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[28] Purves, "The Shape of Torrance Theology," 33.

[29] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 52–53.

[30] I discuss the loss of lament and warped emphasis on celebration in the American church in *Setting the Spiritual Clock: Sacred Time Breaking Through the Secular Eclipse* (Eugene: Cascade, 2020), 73–76. See also Soong-Chan Rah's discussion of the loss of lament in American Christian worship in *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times*, Resonate Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015), 13. See also Walter Brueggemann's analysis of a distorted emphasis on celebration that prizes the "haves" and discounts the "have-nots" in *Peace* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 26–28.

Missing in all of this is Jesus' vicarious identification with us. He totally assumes our fallen human condition without sinning. He assumes it to heal us. He does not ignore or discount our plight. He even cries our cry of dereliction, while also submitting himself in devout obedience to the Father, as Torrance claims. He believes for us when we have no strength to believe. As the incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Lord, he embraces the totality of our human existence, not discounting our suffering, nor allowing it to consume us. We can have confidence that he will remain faithful to the end and dissolve sorrow and swallow death in his joyful, victorious life. Far from being a moralistic therapeutic deistic deity that gives us happiness if we are nice people,[31] he remains faithful even in those moments when we are not lovely or upright. He does more than provide happiness. He engenders "therapeutic joy"[32] that accounts for God's presence amid suffering, triumph over the grave, and ascent into glory all on our behalf. Only in view of him and the vicarious work of the Spirit who pours God's love into our hearts[33] can we respond in faith and obedience. The triune God makes possible a form of worship that accounts for Lenten lament, not as an end all, but as part and parcel of baptismal spirituality involving our union with Jesus in the totality of his existence by the Spirit.[34]

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[31] See Chapter 4 of Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, "God, Religion, Whatever: On Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 118-171.

[32] Jonathan Sacks highlights the importance of Purim and how it provides "therapeutic joy" for the Jewish community. Purim recounts how God delivered his people from ethnic cleansing while they lived in exile. See "The Therapeutic Joy of Purim." *The Office of Rabbi Sacks,* March 1, 2015; http://rabbisacks.org/therapeutic-joy-purim-purim-5775/.

[33] Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 109–110.

[34] On the importance of including but not limiting Christ's vicarious work to his atoning death by crucifixion, see David W. Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ: Incarnate, Crucified, Risen, and Ascended," *Participatio: The Journal of the T.F. Torrance Theological Fellowship* Supplement 2 (2013): 102–115. On the importance of Lenten lament, not simply for reflecting at length on Christ's suffering and death but including it as part of our union with Christ in the totality of his being and activity, see Carrie Steenwyk and John D. Witvliet, *The Worship Sourcebook*. 2nd edn. (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2013), 557–558.

Realistic Hope

Second, we must account for a personalist framework in palliative care, which resonates with Torrance's kinetic emphasis on the particular and dynamic reality of God's personal Word made flesh in space and time. It stands in marked contrast to the generic and timeless logic of a hidden impersonal logos. This personalist emphasis engenders realistic hope.

Contrary to one surgeon's premature prognosis a few weeks after my son's injury (for which his colleague, a neurosurgeon, later apologized), Christopher attained minimal consciousness within a few months following the tragic event. His story helps me be ever mindful of the importance of personalist ethics in palliative care. Along the way, I have drawn upon the counsel and expertise of Robert Lyman Potter, noted earlier, a palliative care specialist who is a personalist medical ethicist. Potter has shared with my wife and me that in Christopher's case, "The probabilities for meaningful recovery are slim, but the possibilities are real."

There is no way to predict how a given person will respond to a catastrophic injury. This much we know. Every time we see intentional activity, it extends both the possibilities and probabilities. The possibilities and probabilities may end with time. But with each advance in intentional activity, both possibilities and probabilities increase. According to Potter, "Minimal changes indicate maximal possibilities."[35] As more possibilities show up, it increases the probabilities, but we don't know how much statistically.[36] Potter also asserts that "Every patient, who is also a person, is the exception to the rule."[37]

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[35] Robert Lyman Potter: quoted in Paul Louis Metzger, "Small Steps Can Lead to Big Gains in Life," *Uncommon God, Common Good*, Patheos (September 17, 2022), https://www.patheos.com/blogs/uncommongodcommongood/2022/09/small-steps-can-lead-to-big-gains-in-life/.

[36] Paul Louis Metzger, "Hope Springs Eternal with Every Day and Year," *Uncommon God, Common Good*, Patheos (March 12, 2022), https://www.patheos.com/blogs/uncommongodcommongood/2022/03/hope-springs-eternal-with-every-day-and-year/.

[37] Robert Lyman Potter: quoted in Paul Louis Metzger, "Jesus the Master Physician: Every Patient an Exception to the Rule;" *Uncommon God, Common Good*, Patheos (February 13, 2021): https://www.patheos.com/blogs/uncommongodcommongood/2021/02/jesus-the-master-physician-every-patient-an-exception-to-the-rule/.

Statistical analysis can prove helpful. But it can easily end up as a form of timeless logic, abstracted from a given temporal, personal situation. Potter claims, "Learning statistics is learning probabilities," not actualities in each individual instance. The problem all too frequently arises that medical professionals "translate probabilities into individuals. That's not possible." They mistakenly turn their rightful pursuit of objectivity and realism into "thinking they know what will happen in each and every individual case. They need to understand that they have statistical knowledge, but not knowledge of any one particular case." One has no idea what will ultimately happen in an individual situation. "Probabilities only apply to a group of individuals, not an individual patient."[38]

A neurologist who has given us incredible insight into Christopher's situation claimed that the statistics surrounding TBI are skewed. Why? Decisions were made in the past to pull the plug prematurely in most instances. This neurologist reasons that given Christopher's young age, that the brain damage is the result of an external source (blunt force trauma) rather than a preexisting chronic condition, that Christopher was/is in very good physical health, the possibilities for meaningful recovery expand with time. This perspective runs contrary to how many viewed TBI in the past.

Each human life is a mystery. We need to account for this 'fact' in attending to each individual patient. Individual persons are not numbers or statistics. When we go beyond probabilities to operate as if we have certainty, we are not objective and realistic enough. Objectivity and realism account for complexity and remote possibilities that may end up defying the statistical generalizations.

I fear that in some unintentional way medical professionals can project possible outcomes onto patients and turn them into self-fulfilling prophecies, if and when they operate according to one or both of the following dynamics: focusing only on generalizations based on statistical groupings, and failing to account for the mystery and agency of each critical care patient who is a person. Such presumed

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[38] Robert Lyman Potter; quoted in Paul Louis Metzger, "Statistical Probabilities and Personal Possibilities in Patient and Pastoral Care," *Uncommon God, Common Good*, Patheos (March 13, 2021), https://www.patheos.com/blogs/uncommongodcommongood/2021/03/statistical-probabilities-and-personal-possibilities-in-patient-and-pastoral-care/.

realism is not objective enough. That is why I have appreciated the realistic exhortation of a respiratory therapist to remain positive and hopeful, the objective evaluation of a neurosurgeon who left open the room for medical miracles, and a perceptive nurse who said we are waiting to see how Christopher will respond. The combined emphasis on hope, mystery, and a patient's unique personal agency speaks volumes to me.[39]

How does this relate to Torrance's theology and dying soldiers' collective question about God being like Jesus? As was noted earlier, God does not operate according to "timeless logical connections"[40] but in accordance with the person of Jesus, "the living, acting, and reigning Lord."[41] He is God's eternal logos made human flesh and blood for our sake. In no way does this suggest that medical science or statistics go out the window. Rather, in view of his particularity as the logos of God become flesh, all generalities account for what likely will happen or what may happen, but not necessarily happen. We must withhold judgment when addressing each situation one faces in palliative and pastoral care, whether as a doctor, a pastor, or a chaplain. We must be open to the element of surprise rather than approach patients in critical care situations, or parishioners with spiritual and emotional maladies, as self-fulfilling prophecies. Jesus makes possible realistic hope for how we encounter every person and every patient we meet. He is the humanizing human and personalizing person who is God's eternal Word or logic made flesh in time and space.

Resounding Love

Third, we must account for God's resounding or participatory love in palliative care. Speaking of our union with Christ, Torrance maintains that "the mission of the church is not an extension of the mission of Jesus but is a sharing in the mission of Jesus."[42] Far from extending Christ, we participate in his life through the Spirit's

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[39] This specific reflection first appeared in my blog essay, "Statistical Probabilities and Personal Possibilities in Patient and Pastoral Care."

[40] Torrance, *Theological Science*, 154.

[41] See Purves, "The Shape of Torrance Theology," 23.

[42] Ibid., 34.

constitutive work. In this way, we become the community for others in and through Jesus, who is the man for others, to commandeer Dietrich Bonhoeffer's language.[43] We share in Christ's sufferings in a godless world.[44] Jesus poured himself out for us (*kenosis*). We in turn participate in his offering through the Spirit who pours God's love into our hearts in response to which we pour ourselves out for others. In so doing, we participate in his glory (*theosis*). Michael Gorman refers to this dynamism as "*Kenosis* is *theosis*."[45]

Union with God and *theosis* is not based on meritorious love for God, but the meritorious mercies of God's love for us poured out in Jesus' life. Jesus made himself nothing so that we who are unworthy could partake of his fullness. Martin Luther maintained that God's love creates the attraction. Our attractiveness does not create God's love.[46] If this is true of us, we cannot exclude the critically ill and disabled. Moreover, God elevates that which is weak and foolish by the world's standards (1 Corinthians 1:27). In fact, those who appear weaker are "indispensable" (1 Corinthians 11:22), a point not lost on Henri Nouwen and the ministry of *L'Arche*.[47]

As the humanizing human and personalizing person, Jesus gets down on eye level with us rather than looks down on us. Incarnation replaces condescension, aloofness, and disdain. We must operate in the same way toward the sick and dying through our participation in his life and humble, glorious love by the Spirit.

Participation in Jesus' humble love is resounding, compelling us to have a humble posture toward those in vulnerable healthcare situations. Jesus never operates in a manner that respects people in accordance with their relative mental

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[43] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 8 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 501, 503.

[44] Ibid., 480–482.

[45] Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 37.

[46] Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 43–44, 48.

[47] See Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey* (New York: Image, 1990).

capacities, social status, or market import. Nor should we. Some of our greatest teachers are those experiencing critical care ordeals, such as my son. They are indispensable to our wellbeing, just as we are called to support them in pursuit of a meaningful quality of life. Advocacy for those in critical care situations should never convey a condescending attitude or sense of superiority. Regardless of their vulnerable circumstances, they are not valueless and voiceless. We must take it upon ourselves to affirm their inherent dignity and agency and to amplify their voices in whatever way their persons communicate with us, whether through words, facial expressions, bodily movements, vitals, and/or a variety of other means.

In view of how Jesus humanizes and personalizes all people, especially those most vulnerable, we must make sure we approach those in critical care situations, whether they be of a physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual nature in a humanizing and personalizing way. In view of Jesus who does not operate by "divine *fiat*, or by some transaction conducted above our heads, but by a real incarnation into the heart of our humanity to save us from within and from below by an act of love and grace,"[48] we must account for the complexities in each individual patient's care.

Once again, I call to mind palliative care specialist, Potter, who asks three questions from his unique personalist vantage point in dealing with palliative care patients. These points can serve pastors and chaplains equally well in advocating for the sick and dying who are entrusted to their care: "What is going on here?" "What ought I to care about?" and "What is the fitting response?"[49] From Potter's personalist vantage point, the patient rather than the doctor, family, hospital shareholders, and/or insurance companies, is who medical ethicists — and hospital

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[48] Purves, "The Shape of Torrance Theology," 29.

[49] Robert Potter derives the first and third questions from H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, Library of Theological Ethics (1963; repr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 59–68. The second or intermediate question he takes from Harry Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About," in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 80–94. Over against deontological and teleological ethics, Niebuhr presents a cathecontic approach, which emphasizes "an ethic of appropriateness or fitting response." See the foreword by Schweiker to Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, xi. For all the differences between Barth with Torrance in comparison with the Niebuhr brothers, there is resonance when it concerns moving beyond abstractions to engage real life situations as human persons.

chaplains and pastors — should prioritize as most important in palliative care. We must be fully conscious of them and care most for their wellbeing, since it is their life that is most at stake.

We may not be able to 'heal' them, or those with other maladies. But they might help us become alert and maximally conscious of our own need for divine mercy and realize our own vulnerable human state of existence. In doing so, we might experience relational healing in solidarity with them at the margins of their temporal existence by clinging to Jesus' unconditional love and vicarious humanity in which all participate.

Here I call to mind Nouwen's words in *The Wounded Healer*. There he writes: "A minister is not a doctor whose primary task is to take away pain. Rather, he deepens the pain to a level where it can be shared."[50] As we enter into Jesus' identification with us in our suffering, may we share in one another's suffering so that together we may experience relational healing, thereby affirming one another's equality and dignity. In so doing, we follow Jesus in considering others, especially those most vulnerable, as better than ourselves. Such dignified solidarity is truly humanizing and personalizing and fosters a kinetic and kenotic theology of pastoral care.

Human dignity does not result from a divine decree uttered in the dark unknown. Nor is it a capacity like reason or physical prowess. Similarly, it does not result from individual preference or societal projection, including faceless market preferences and values.[51] Rather, each individual's dignity derives from the one who assumed our humanity to make us whole. Jesus' dignifying care of all people, especially the sick and dying, as the humanizing human and personalizing person preserves their dignity.

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[50] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Image, 1979), 92–93.

[51] I resonate with Christian Smith's account of human dignity not being a capacity or a preference. I complement his reflections with a theological rendering of dignity in view of the triune God in *More Than Things: A Personalist Ethics for a Throwaway Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), 81–84. See Christian Smith, *What Is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 446–456.

Given that Jesus assumed our human condition in all its finitude, fragility, and fallibility, healed and transformed it, ascending to the right hand of God, our identity and dignity are secure. Jesus is our advocate, our pastor and chaplain, as we participate in his vicarious humanity. All of us, including those in critical care situations, have secure identity and dignity in him. To paraphrase Paul's glorious words in Romans 8, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, no decree of a hidden and disinterested deity who is blind to our struggles and suffering, no diminished capacity, no comatose or minimal conscious state, no market society where economic value is all that counts.[52] Jesus never throws in the towel on us in our throwaway culture, no matter our capacities and status. In view of him, may we never throw in the towel on one another.

My hope and prayer is that this flesh and blood, pastoral-theological meditation advances T.F. Torrance scholarship and serves as a benefit to others in their lives and pastoral ministries in and through Jesus by the Spirit in support of those who are seriously ill, critically injured, gravely sick, and dying.

[52] On concern over market ideology's encroachment in every area of life, see Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of the Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012).

Jenny Richards, "Holistic Justice: Using the Work of T. F. Torrance and J. B. Torrance to Reframe Responses for Christian Women Experiencing Domestic and Family Violence," *Participatio* 12: "The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance" (2024), 93-121; #2024-JR-1. CC-by-nc-sa.

HOLISTIC JUSTICE:

Using the Work of T. F. Torrance and J. B. Torrance to Reframe Responses for Christian Women Experiencing Domestic and Family Violence

Jenny Richards, Ph.D.

Lecturer in Law, College of Business, Government and Law, Flinders University

jenny.richards@flinders.edu.au

***Abstract**: Church leaders may struggle to incorporate considerations of justice within their responses to domestic and family violence against Christian women. Thomas F. Torrance's unitary theological method, i.e. his integration of ontology and epistemology, his rejection of dualism, and his 'onto-relational' understanding of personhood, can all be valuably applied to bring clarity to this discussion. Beyond informing pastoral church responses, this work can conceptualize justice in a way that holds its theological and legal meanings together and reframes understandings of and responses to the impacts of violence. When considered alongside James B. Torrance's concepts of theological covenant and theological justice, the result is a unitary approach which theorizes theological justice holistically and theorizes domestic and family violence against Christian women onto-relationally. Crucially for an issue replete with interdisciplinary, intersecting and deeply personal aspects, this enables the reframing and integration of relevant faith and legal components. Further, the Torrances' profoundly dignifying understandings of human personhood can be brought to bear on the damage to the victim/survivor's sense of self,*

opening space for a deeply integrated, 'embodied' form of justice to be experienced as a response to the violence.[1]

1. Issues of Justice in the Context of Pastoral Domestic and Family Violence Responses

A discussion of justice is largely missing from the current global conversations about faith-based responses to domestic and family violence against Christian women, despite the significant amount of work being done internationally with churches and in social work and human-service related sectors now in researching and responding to religious domestic and family violence.[2] This is not meant to imply that no one working in religious domestic and family violence is thinking about justice or bringing theological meanings of justice to bear in their pastoral work with women. Some certainly are. Rather, the gap is in connecting theological meanings of justice with secular legal meanings in such a way that discussions of concepts such as forgiveness and theological justice are inclusive of the broader criminal justice system. Without alignment of those elements at a conceptual level,

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*With thanks to Kate Tyler for perceptive comments on an earlier draft.

[1] Some sections of this article were published in Jenny Richards, "'Love, Justice and Freedom for All': Using the Work of T.F. Torrance and J.B. Torrance to Address Domestic and Family Violence' in *Torrance and Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis,* eds. Myk Habets and R. Lucas Stamps (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023) 261–281, and are used by permission.

[2] This article focuses on domestic and family violence committed against married Christian women by their husbands, and references to the gender of perpetrators is attributed accordingly. I acknowledge that such violence is also committed against Christian men by their wives and can also involve spiritual and emotional abuse by twisting teachings about marriage in a parallel way to the dynamics discussed in this essay. Nonetheless, this essay focuses on domestic and family violence against Christian women because it remains largely an issue in which patriarchal norms are reinforced and turned against women, and almost all of the existing research considers such abuse as it relates to women. Having said that, many of the principles discussed in this essay — and importantly, all of the potential benefits of reconceptualizing domestic and family violence experiences using the work of the Torrances — would also apply to free and restore dignity and safety to men who suffer such violence from their Christian wives. They, too, are seen in this space.

it becomes difficult to approach responses to domestic and family violence in a way that does not implicitly preference a faith response to a criminal justice response.

Research on domestic and family violence[3] against Christian women has identified two main theological issues: how to improve pastoral responses by addressing harmful theological beliefs, and how churches can work collaboratively with human services.[4] Improvement of pastoral responses tends to focus on addressing theological teachings which either condone or enable domestic and family violence. These beliefs include oppressive teachings about female submission in marriage, male entitlement and headship, patriarchal attitudes towards gender equality, the characterization of domestic and family violence as a spiritual issue requiring prayer and other spiritual solutions, and imperatives of forgiveness and

[3] See discussion in Richards, "Seeking Love, Justice and Freedom," 262-264.

[4] Nancy Nason-Clark and Catherine Holtmann, "Naming the Abuse, Establishing Networks and Forging Negotiations: Contemporary Christian Women and the Ugly Subject of Domestic Violence," in *Contemporary Issues in the Worldwide Anglican Communion: Powers and Pieties*, ed. Abby Day (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 75–93; Elisabet le Roux and Nadine Bowers-Du Toit, "Men and Women in Partnership: Mobilizing Faith Communities to Address Gender-Based Violence," *Diaconia* 8, no. 1 (2017): 23–37; Anna Perkins, "Christian Norms and Intimate Male Partner Violence: Lessons from a Jamaica Women's Health Survey," in *The Holy Spirit and Social Justice Interdisciplinary Global Perspectives: History, Race & Culture*, ed. Antipas Harris and Michael Palmer (Lanham: Seymour Press, 2019), 240–267 Leonie Westenberg, "When She Calls for Help: Domestic Violence in Christian Families," *Social Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2017): 71; Shoshana Ringel and Juyoung Park, "Intimate Partner Violence in the Evangelical Community: Faith-Based Interventions and Implications for Practice," *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 27, no. 4 (2008): 341–60.

continuation of the marriage due to its indissolubility.[5] Collaboration with human service organizations is naturally concerned with maximizing safety and assisting in violence prevention.

This essay sits alongside those efforts, expanding the conversation into a parallel area by bringing law and justice explicitly within the consideration of how that 'faith response' to domestic and family violence is conceptualized. It will focus on the question of criminal justice system involvement but is relevant for broader questions of law and justice. Drawing on the theological work of Thomas F Torrance and James B. Torrance for its theological content, it analyzes ways in which faith and law considerations can promote a deeper restoration and a form of justice for women experiencing domestic and family violence by being held together in what can be referred to as a faith-law response. This kind of response would enable women to engage more readily with the criminal justice system if that were an

[5] On these issues, see Stephen R. Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 3 (2007): 573; Irene Sevcik et al., eds., *Overcoming Conflicting Loyalties: Intimate Partner Violence, Community Resources, and Faith* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2015); Nancy Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing Solutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190607210.001.0001; Romina Istratii and Parveen Ali, "A Scoping Review on the Role of Religion in the Experience of IPV and Faith-Based Responses in Community and Counseling Settings," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 51, no. 2 (2023): 141–173, https://doi.org/10.1177/00916471221143440; Jaclyn D Houston-Kolnik, Nathan R Todd, and Megan R Greeson, "Overcoming the 'Holy Hush': A Qualitative Examination of Protestant Christian Leaders' Responses to Intimate Partner Violence," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 63 (2019): 135, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12278; Rebecca Barnes and Kristin Aune, "Gender and Domestic Abuse Victimisation Among Churchgoers in Northwest England: Breaking the Church's Gendered Silence," *Journal of Gender-Based Violence* 5, no. 2 (2021): 271–228; Beth Crisp, "Faith Communities as a Setting for the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence," in *Eliminating Gender-Based Violence*, ed. Ann Taket and Beth Crisp (London: Routledge, 2018), 124; Mandy Truong et al., "Attitudes and Beliefs About Family and Domestic Violence in Faith-Based Communities: An Exploratory Qualitative Study," *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 57 (2022): 880–897.

option they wished to pursue.[6] Importantly, it would ensure that involvement of the criminal justice system was *not* viewed as being somehow contrary to a 'faith response.' To put it more simply, it is not unchristian or any kind of concession or lesser option to involve the police in a situation of domestic and family violence. If that is something that is sought or desired, it forms *part of* a Christian response.

2. Three Conceptual Issues Complicating Help-Seeking for Domestic and Family Violence

The reason for the place of the Torrances' work to inform an integrated conceptualization of faith and law responses for women may seem deceptively simple: the main barriers to help seeking — including criminal justice system engagement — by Christian women experiencing domestic and family violence are steeped in forms of dualisms, and compounded by issues of language slippage between legal and theological meanings relating to justice, and these are areas specifically addressed by the Torrances. The most common examples of such issues which operate dualistically are the perceived sacred/secular divide, which locates the criminal justice system as a 'secular' response and thus distinct from a faith response, and a characterization of domestic and family violence as a private matter, with justice responses being viewed as part of the public realm.

A further issue which flows from these two dichotomies is a tendency to apply some Christian teachings in a way which disconnects them from other teachings and gives them primacy. An example of this is a tendency to view forgiveness as the central requirement of a Christian response to violence and a criminal justice response as involving punishment and, therefore, being inconsistent

[6] I do not take the position that criminal justice system involvement should occur in every case of domestic and family violence. Many women choose not to do so for a variety of reasons including concerns about privacy, what it may mean for the relationship, and very real fears for safety. The system itself can also be fraught and traumatizing in a myriad of ways and may not deliver an outcome that the survivor considers to be 'just.' For those reasons, this article does not suggest that justice system engagement should be championed as the one and only appropriate Christian response. Rather, it seeks to ensure that the justice system is not conceptualized as being outside of or inconsistent with a Christian response, but instead as *being part of* such a Christian response. In this way, the aspects of justice present in the nature of the law itself will be able to speak into that situation irrespective of the extent to which the formal system is engaged.

with a Christian response. For example, a Christian woman may not be comfortable calling the police and possibly having her husband imprisoned if she believes this would essentially be punishing him, or making it difficult to continue the marriage, and would therefore not be consistent with forgiving him. These three conceptualizations complicate women's help-seeking, and effectively locate criminal justice system engagement as a lesser or alternative response, which should only be used as a last resort.

These are issues on which the Torrances' work provides crucial theoretical and practical clarity. As such, it can be drawn from to bridge the perceived divide between a justice response and a faith response, illuminate areas of congruence between legal justice and theological justice, and, in doing so, conceptualize theological justice in a way which enables dignity and personhood to be centered as a corrective to forms of damage caused by the violence itself. In this way, a *faith-law* understanding of justice can be developed, which can be experienced to some degree by women irrespective of what specific involvement they may choose in relation to formal justice system responses.

The emphases of both J. B. and T. F. Torrance on holism and covenant can be brought to bear in addressing these conceptual barriers, particularly because these emphases flow from and are grounded in their understanding of God as Trinity and their consequent Christology. T. F. Torrance's theological method and commitment to holism, as well as his exposition of the mediation of Christ as it relates to theological covenant would all assist here in overcoming the dualistic components of the three barriers to help seeking. J. B. Torrance's work is salient in three key respects. First, assisting us to understand the concept of theological covenant in a way that is profoundly dignifying and protective of the persons in it, rather than supporting a view of marriage that elevates it as an institution over the value of the persons within it. Second, in dealing with language slippage over terms such as law, justice and righteousness which have complicated understandings of covenant and the place of religious obligations towards one another. These first two contributions

are seen in his work on covenant and contract.[7] Third, his perhaps lesser-known work on socio-political reconciliation in South Africa and Northern Ireland illuminates an understanding of how justice operates theologically within a covenantal framework where one party has wronged another.[8] This can be adapted to a situation of domestic and family violence.

All of these features of the Torrances' work can be brought together to ground a faith-law understanding of responses which operate for the women affected and enable a form of justice to be experienced which incorporates faith norms and is congruent with the potential operation of the criminal justice system.

3. Sacred vs Secular, Public vs Private: How Dualistic Thinking Polarizes Domestic and Family Violence Responses.

The primary theological barriers identified by research on responses to domestic and family violence are conceptual or theoretical ones, and all of them involve the presence of dichotomies which develop from various dualist frames of thinking. 'Dualism' as a term has a variety of meanings. Useful definitions for our purposes are "[t]he condition or state of being dual or consisting of two parts; twofold division; duality;" or "[a] theory or system of thought which recognizes two independent principles."[9] Greek philosophical thought is replete with dualist conceptualizations, which have been inherited in many 'western' societies and may be so embedded within them that they are not questioned. Dualisms, by definition, tend to create dichotomous thinking and can lead to the concepts involved being viewed as unconnected elements which are inconsistent with each other. The

[7] James B. Torrance, "Covenant or Contract?: A Study of The Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth Century Scotland," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23, no. 1 (1970): 51–76.

[8] James B. Torrance, "The Ministry of Reconciliation Today: The Realism of Grace," in *Incarnational Ministry: The Presence of Christ in Church, Society, and Family: Essays in Honor of Ray S. Anderson*, ed. Christian D Kettler and Todd H Speidell (Helmers & Howard, 1990), 130–139; James B. Torrance, "Reconciliation, Sectarianism and Civil Religion in South Africa and Northern Ireland" (Unpublished, Undated) available online https://tftorrance.org/u-jbt-2.

[9] "Dualism," in *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), https://www.oed.com/search/advanced/Meanings.

public/private and mind/body dualisms are some of the better-known examples. One particularly familiar for religious people, and directly relevant to domestic and family violence responses, is a perceived dualism which distinguishes between the realms of the sacred and the secular. This is the main form of dualism influencing understandings of domestic and family violence and how to conceptualize responses to it.[10] It does this by locating a faith response as something distinct from and operating separately to whatever the (secular) justice system response may be.

The sacred/secular dualism views a faith or Christian response to domestic and family violence as something separate from whatever the justice system (or other secular agencies) might do. It creates a law/faith binary or dualist understanding of options for responding to domestic and family violence, which *distinguishes* a justice response from a faith response and can view them as inconsistent with each other. Accordingly, it presents them as disconnected, unrelated alternatives between which the woman must choose. It can also characterize domestic and family violence itself as a spiritual problem to resolve with spiritual solutions, rather than being first and foremost a crime. Implicit within that kind of conceptualization is an awareness that the most important thing for a Christian woman to consider when responding to the violence against her is to respond in a way that is consistent with relevant religious teachings or norms. A further complication is that if the violence is characterized by churches and by women as a private and religious issue, the appropriate response or solution to the

[10] Excellent Chireshe, "Barriers to the Utilisation of Provisions of the Zimbabwean Domestic Violence Act among Abused Christian Women in Zimbabwe," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 16, no. 2 (2015): 262–264; le Roux, "A Scoping Study on the Role of Faith Communities and Organisations in Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: Implications for Policy and Practice," 55; Andrew Behnke, Natalie Ames, and Tina Hancock, "What Would They Do? Latino Church Leaders and Domestic Violence," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27, no. 7 (2012): 1259–1275; Kim Beecheno, "Conservative Christianity and Intimate Partner Violence in Brazil: Using Feminism to Question Patriarchal Interpretations of Religion," *Religion and Gender* 11 (2021): 254–255; Istratii and Ali, "A Scoping Review on the Role of Religion in the Experience of IPV and Faith-Based Responses in Community and Counseling Settings"; le Roux and Bowers-Du Toit, "Men and Women in Partnership: Mobilizing Faith Communities to Address Gender-Based Violence," 33.

violence is likewise characterized as private and spiritual.[11] This may lead to justice system involvement potentially being viewed as off the table; or instead as a last resort reserved for the most severe cases, or perhaps those involving children.

This kind of polarized characterization may be more likely to occur if the faith response is viewed as one which gives primacy to forgiveness and emphasizes grace. Such a response may be viewed as being at odds with a justice response, particularly if justice is believed to be synonymous with punishment.[12] What we see here is a further dualism in operation, which flows out of the first two, particularly the sacred/secular divide. That further dualism is a tendency to separate out particular teachings and doctrines from one another and give primacy to some of them — particularly forgiveness — rather than holding all teachings together when considering a faith response. This kind of response would hold forgiveness out as the preeminent personal response which is required for domestic and family violence. It is this kind of understanding which may then struggle to find a place for justice, *especially* if justice is viewed as a secular response. This can lead to the

[11] Barbara Zust et al., "10-Year Study of Christian Church Support for Domestic Violence Victims: 2005-2015," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36, no. 3–4 (2018): 1–27, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518754473; Truong et al., "Attitudes and Beliefs About Family and Domestic Violence in Faith-Based Communities: An Exploratory Qualitative Study"; Westenberg, "When She Calls for Help: Domestic Violence in Christian Families"; Y Joon Choi and Elizabeth Cramer, "An Exploratory Study of Female Korean American Church Leaders' Views on Domestic Violence," *Social Work and Christianity* 43, no. 4 (2016): 3–32; Bernadine Waller, Jalana Harris, and Camille R Quinn, "Caught in the Crossroad: An Intersectional Examination of African American Women Intimate Partner Violence Survivors' Help Seeking," *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 23, no. 4 (October 2022): 1245, https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838021991303; Perkins, "Christian Norms and Intimate Male Partner Violence: Lessons from a Jamaica Women's Health Survey," 253.

[12] As Tyler helpfully noted when reading an earlier draft: this kind of characterization can occur in theories of atonement which emphasize punishment. I consider that language slippage, which emphasizes the punitive nature of Roman law, lends itself to this kind of characterization also. That issue is discussed below.

ambivalence mentioned in the introduction: how, one might ask, can a Christian woman have her husband *arrested* if she is meant to be *forgiving* him?[13]

4. T. F. Torrance: Rejecting False Dichotomies and Calling for Holism

T. F. Torrance's work is tailor-made to address the kinds of false dichotomies replete in religious domestic and family violence for two main reasons.[14] The first is that a central component of his theological work involved deconstructing dualist frames of knowledge in a range of fields, including law and theology. In its place, he advocated holistic theological method, realism in law, and holism not only in theological teachings but also in legal theory.[15] This holism involves an integration of epistemology and ontology alongside a rejection of dualist modes of thinking, such as sacred/secular and mind/body, which have impacted ways in which domestic and family violence is conceptualized and responded to. As such, his work provides a direct conceptual corrective to the three false dichotomies which constitute barriers to help-seeking: a tendency to conceptualize a faith response as separate or preferable to a justice response; viewing domestic and family violence as private and therefore the responsibility of the woman to resolve; and the separating out of doctrines like forgiveness from within the context of related teachings such as justice, repentance and restoration.

[13] This kind of thinking can be pervasive. It is worth noting that it smacks of something akin to victim-blaming, as it locates the responsibility for responding to the violence at the feet of the woman. It also wrongly implies that she is the one responsible if her husband is arrested, rather than viewing that as a consequence of the violence he has chosen, and thus his responsibility. One's view of women and their role in marriage might be directly influential here as noted above.

[14] See also Richards, "Seeking Love, Justice and Freedom", 265-266.

[15] Thomas F. Torrance, *Juridical Law and Physical Law: Toward a Realist Foundation for Human Law* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1997) Chapter 1.

T. F. Torrance was committed to a profound integration of ontology and epistemology in how both reality and theology are understood.[16] His theological method is reflective of the implications of the self-revelation of God to humanity in Jesus Christ for Christians' knowledge of God.[17] Torrance rejects dualistic frames of knowledge and dualisms more generally as being inconsistent with his realist theological method. He uses a general concept of dualism which views things as separate and unrelated, rather than as involving inherent connection as part of a greater whole. This kind of unrelatedness is implicit in the sacred/secular and public/private dualisms.

Tyler explains[18] that Torrance applied a *kataphysic* method of inquiry in which the nature of the thing studied determines the appropriate method with which it is to be studied or known. In this method, "how we know and what we know are to be dictated by the object of our inquiry."[19] It requires a dynamic and ever-deepening form of knowledge that rejects dualisms and involves a theological knowledge that is personal.[20] Of specific relevance to law and justice in situations of interpersonal violence are those forms of dualism which relate to epistemology and ontology generally — as that is a focus of Torrance's — and by implication, those which lead to a fragmented conception of human existence and personhood, such as mind/body, or indeed viewing human being as first and foremost as individuals, rather than persons in relationship to God and others. In law, these dualisms are seen in the Lockean concept of personhood reflected in his social contract, in which

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[16] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (London: T&T Clark, 1995); Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985). He also takes this approach to his analysis of law in *Juridical Law and Physical Law*.

[17] Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons*, 21ff.

[18] For a helpful explanation of the connections between Torrance's work on theology and science, his theological method, rejection of dualisms and recognition of the place of personal knowledge, see Kate Tyler, *The Ecclesiology of Thomas F. Torrance: Koinonia and the Church* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019), 8–15.

[19] Ibid., 10.

[20] Ibid., 13. Tyler notes the influence of Polanyi on Torrance's approach to personal knowledge, here.

individual persons organize relationships between others externally, and indeed created deliberately by the persons themselves, rather than inherently present as a part of who those persons *are*.

Torrance's particular realist epistemology, inclusive of his onto-relational framework for human relationships and law suits an interdisciplinary consideration (and theorization) of the ways in which the justice system could better dialogue with and take into account such variables and intangibles as personal spiritual beliefs held by Christian women experiencing domestic and family violence. It would also assist church, domestic and family violence, and justice system workers address them in a way that is faithful to both law and personal belief/faith norms.[21]

5. Onto-relationality and its Utility in Reframing Justice

T. F. Torrance's well-known concept of onto-relations outworks his holistic understanding of being and knowing to recognize interrelationship, which is a consequence of the integration of epistemology and ontology. It articulates "the kind of relation subsisting between things which is an essential constituent of their being, and without which they would not be what they are."[22] It also reflects a knowledge of oneself which begins in relationship to others, rather than as an individual who forges connections with others as a second and external feature. This latter aspect reflects its basis in holistic, rather than dualistic, frames of knowledge. Colyer explains it refers to:

> The dynamic inter-relationality of reality (ontology — form inherent in being) and the kind of inquiry required in order to grasp and articulate this interrelatedness (epistemology — the integration of form in knowing). These interrelations, or "onto-relations" as Torrance calls them, are relations so basic that they are inseparable from, and characteristic of, what realities *are*. If we are to really understand realities, Torrance argues, we must investigate them in the nexus of their interconnections, rather than in isolation, for they are what they

[21] For this section, see also Richards, 'Seeking Love, Justice and Freedom", 267-269.

[22] Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology: The Realism of Christian Revelation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1982), 42–43.

are by virtue of the relations in which they are embedded.[23]

Conceptualizing something onto-relationally, then, looks beyond the facts about that experience or reality, and also encounters it in the context of the relationships which someone holds with others, and with themselves. It becomes a truth which impacts and takes into account the core of who they are and how they encounter their world — integrating ontology and epistemology — and is lived out by the person. There is utility in employing T. F Torrance's particular concept of onto-relationality as a typology[24] in theorizing and understanding relevant concepts in domestic and family violence against Christian women, as well as the effects of the violence itself. It is holistic in that it integrates ontology and epistemology, but this specific application is further grounded in a trinitarian and covenantal understanding of reality and personhood, which centers the Christological emphases of T. F. Torrance in his theological method and of J. B. Torrance in his work on theological covenant.

The concept of onto-relations, particularly when viewed within its Christological and trinitarian context, is of crucial importance in both understanding the wrong of all forms of violence and providing a conceptual framework within which to approach the vast range of theological, personal, and pastoral issues that arise.[25] For T. F. Torrance, a realist approach to Christian theology requires a focus on the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of the Father, for what it means to be a human person made in the image of God.[26] It is *in Christ* that God has 'personalized' humanity, with such personalization and relationality being

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[23] Elmer Colyer, *How to Read T.F Torrance Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 55–56.

[24] I am grateful to Andrew Torrance for this suggestion.

[25] See also Richards, "Seeking Love, Justice and Freedom", 267-269.

[26] Colyer, 55–56.

constitutive of a human being's reality.[27] Human being is therefore understood as onto-relational, rather than primarily individual: "there is an inherent relatedness in human being which is a creaturely reflection of a transcendent relatedness in Divine Being. This is the personal or inter-personal structure of humanity in which there is imaged the ineffable personal relations of the Holy Trinity."[28]

The onto-relational structure of the Trinity has implications for human relating and also requires relevant Christian teachings to be understood and interpreted onto-relationally and holistically. This kind of onto-relational theorization of domestic and family violence requires consideration of the effect of the violence on one's knowledge of self, knowledge of self in relation to others, and knowledge of self in relation to the Trinity. When domestic and family violence is viewed in this way, it requires consideration of the internal/epistemological effects of the violence: what that violence says or implies about the person and the effect it has upon their sense of self and what they believe as a result, as well as their external relations.

At its core, violence depersonalizes, as it objectifies and devalues the person against whom it is perpetrated. In short, it has an onto-epistemological effect. The realm of the personal, particularly in the context of a trinitarian understanding of theological covenant, does not allow for abuse, and any form of domestic and family violence is a fundamental breach of that relationship. For both of the Torrances, the person and work of Christ cannot be separated,[29] and the dignifying impact of the incarnation of Christ on the Christian understanding of personhood is central here. Theologically, covenant includes a commitment to upholding the

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[27] See Thomas F. Torrance, "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective," in *Religion, Reason and the Self: Essays in Honour of Hywel*, ed. D Lewis, Stewart Sutherland, and T A Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989), 114, citing A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920). See also Marty Folsom, "Thomas F. Torrance and Personalism: Distinctions, Clarifications and Paths Forward for Christian Anthropology," *Participatio* 9 (2021): 82–84; Gary Deddo, "The Importance of the Personal in the Onto-Relational Theology of Thomas F. Torrance," in *T & T Clark Handbook of Thomas F. Torrance*, ed. Paul Molnar and Myk Habets (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 143.

[28] Torrance, "The Soul and Person, in Theological Perspective," 109–110.

[29] James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 52–53; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 9.

fundamental dignity of human beings as being made in the image of God and participating in the life of God through the incarnate Person of Jesus. This is one reason why J. B. Torrance's work, discussed below, emphasizes that this kind of trinitarian, covenantal relating involves giving one's humanity back to each other. An onto-relational law-faith typology would conceptualize justice in a way that centers personhood, dignity, freedom, and safety.

6. James B. Torrance: Covenantal, Holistic Relating

In much of his academic and pastoral work, J. B. Torrance distinguished between a theological *covenant* and a legal *contract*.[30] His central contention was that the conflation of covenant with contract lends itself to an erroneous contractual, legalistic understanding of theological covenant and, therefore, of the Christian Gospel itself. This would, in turn, have various consequences for the content of doctrinal teachings and the way in which individual Christians may approach their own discipleship and faith decisions, particularly in how they live out their relationships within their church communities and how they understand God's love toward them.[31]

J. B. Torrance outlines an ontologically grounded theological understanding of covenant involving a divine basis in unconditional love. Relational obligations — such as forgiving one another and repenting from wrongs done — arise from this understanding, which are also unconditional.[32]

A trinitarian, covenantal understanding of marriage condemns domestic and family violence in the strongest terms. It is unthinkable, given that both parties are committed to loving each other unconditionally. Violent behavior is the literal opposite of covenantal behavior, so to speak. The theological position taken by the Torrances cannot in any way be seen to condone it, and the concept of

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[30] See Torrance, "Covenant or Contract?: A Study of The Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth Century Scotland"; Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*; James B. Torrance, "The Contribution of McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26 (1973): 295.

[31] Ibid. See also Richards, "Seeking Love, Justice and Freedom for All", 269.

unconditional love (and unconditional forgiveness) that it involves should, therefore, never be used to justify a demand for performative forgiveness from the victim and ongoing exposure to danger.

The dignifying of humanity and personhood inherent in the work of the Torrances through their teachings about the nature of the Christian God as Trinity requires the persons in a marriage to be valued above marriage as an institution in and of itself. T. F. Torrance's work on marriage viewed it as a relationship which is lived out within the church community rather than disconnected from it.[33] This, too, opens space for violence occurring behind closed doors to be viewed as the business of the church community rather than a private matter, and for church leadership to then stand with victims of domestic and family violence and prioritize their wellbeing.[34]

7. Theological Meanings of Justice and Covenant

In exploring the implications of covenantal obligations for how Christians should relate to God and to one another, J. B. Torrance was acutely aware of the influence of Greek or Western philosophy and translations of relevant terminology, especially from Latin and Hebrew. Both J. B. Torrance and Alan Torrance[35] have noted the doctrinal confusion that results from conflating the Hebrew word for law, *torah* with its Latin word *lex*.[36] There are also crucial inconsistencies in meaning between the original Hebrew for covenant (*berith*) and equivalent words in Latin and in English. This conflation can be linked with the fact that the Latin word *foedus*, means both covenant and contract.[37] I would add that this slippage is compounded within

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[33] Thomas F. Torrance, "The Christian Doctrine of Marriage," *Theology: A Monthly Journal of Historic Christianity* 56 (1953): 166.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Much of the rest of this section is taken from Richards, "Seeking Love, Justice and Freedom", 270-271.

[36] See Alan J. Torrance, "Forgiveness and Christian Character: Reconciliation, Exemplarism and the Shape of Moral Theology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 30, no. 3 (2017): 301–302.

[37] Torrance, "Covenant or Contract?: A Study of The Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth Century Scotland"; Torrance, "Forgiveness and Christian Character: Reconciliation, Exemplarism and the Shape of Moral Theology."

contemporary usage of 'covenant' and 'contract' because as a legal term there is no real difference in meaning between covenant and contract.

This slippage in language has ramifications for how theological concepts are understood. In particular, it affects understanding of the way in which God relates to humanity, and how people (notably husbands and wives) relate to each other, according to Christian teaching.[38] It also affects understandings of concepts such as forgiveness, repentance, and justice. It leads to conditional, uncertain, and legalistic understandings of those issues. For example, in lecture notes on concepts of grace and law in Judaism, and implications for interpreting the New Testament writings of St Paul, J. B. Torrance describes law in Judaism as being unconditional, but notes "this stress on Law is not legalism. Such fundamental law, enshrined in covenant, is not the Western 'law of contract'."[39] As Alan Torrance notes, when combined with a juxtaposition of the Hebrew word for righteousness (*tzedakah*) with the Latin *iusticia*:

> [the effect … has been to translate thinking about God from essentially filial and koinonial categories [i.e. which emphasise communion/ fellowship and relationality] into legal categories — from categories that are 'second personal' in character to impersonal, 'third person' modes of interpretation.[40]

In contrast to such legalistic and detached interpretations, J. B. Torrance notes that due to those filial emphases, Hebraic understandings of righteousness incorporate

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[38] Ibid. See Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract?' 52–56; 62; see also discussion in *The Doctrine of God and Theological Ethics,* ed. Alan J. Torrance and Michael Banner (London: T&T Clark International, 2006) 172–174; *Trinity and Transformation*, ed. Todd Speidel (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016) ; Alexandra S. Radcliff *The Claim of Humanity in Christ* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 6–7; Myk Habets, '"To Err Is Human, to Forgive Is Divine": The Ontological Foundations of Forgiveness' in *The Art of Forgiveness,* ed. Philip Halstead and Myk Habets (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018) 3–16.

[39] James B. Torrance, "Grace and Law in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism" (Seminar Paper, Fuller Seminary, no date) 2.

[40] See Torrance, "Forgiveness and Christian Character," 303.

both love *and* justice into the word *tzedakah*.[41] The implications of these different meanings of justice for responding to domestic and family violence will be explored further below. J. B. Torrance insisted on a thoroughly onto-relational concept of theological covenant, and focused on what it discloses about the heart and motivation of the Trinity and the effectiveness of the reconciling person and work of Christ as Mediator through his vicarious humanity.[42]

All of these doctrinal positions have dignifying ramifications for how Christians are to view their personal identities. While not doing so explicitly, in rejecting a contractual view of God, J. B. Torrance implicitly shared T. F. Torrance's rejection of dualism in the Christian understanding of God or of God and human relations in the covenant.[43] Theological covenants are ontologically grounded. As such, J. B. Torrance's work on covenant and contract utilizes the same theological positions as T. F. Torrance's work on theological method, an onto-relational realist epistemology, and his rejection of dualism. His teachings on covenant, therefore, ground important correctives for faith responses to domestic and family violence.

8. Developing Holistic Understandings of Justice for a Faith-Law Response: Congruence Between Faith and Law

If we are seeking to take a holistic and integrated approach to domestic and family violence which holds congruent understandings of theological and legal concepts of justice together, how might Christians consider afresh the Gospel response to domestic and family violence? It is important to bear in mind that within the legal

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[41] James B. Torrance, "Individual & Person, Society & Community." *The Trinity, the Human Person, and Community with James B Torrance and James Houston* (Vancouver: Regent Audio, 1999) Disc 2, Part 3 ("Individual & Person, Society & Community").

[42] James B. Torrance, "Towards a Theology of Response" (Seminar Paper, Fuller Seminary, no date) 1.

[43] Although he does not refer to it as a dualism, because of his rejection of the contract God, J. B. Torrance does reject the separation or dichotomy between nature and grace that is a feature of Federal Theology. See, for example, Torrance, "Covenant or Contract?" 67–68, where he notes that this would constitute a "departure from the great emphasis of the Reformation that nothing is prior to grace." Newtonian and Cartesian dualism between subject and object are precisely what we see in the requirement of contract that the two parties be equal and independent.

system, 'law' and 'punishment,' 'judgement' and 'justice' are not synonymous. It is here that J. B. Torrance's cautions against contractualism and language-slippage regarding legal terminology — and T. F. Torrance's cautions against dualism — must not be taken as applying as broad-brush cautions about our current legal system. Law, after all, has a theological meaning, as well as a legal meaning.

In his work on covenant and contract, J. B. Torrance was focused on the former, and on dualist concepts of law. As J. B. notes, the nature vs grace model seen in Federal Theology separates law from grace, rather than incorporating an understanding of law that is covenantal and redemptive in its operation.[44] Furthermore, while T. F. Torrance is correct in his critiques of the dualist tendencies of western thought, and its influences on legal theory,[45] more recent jurisprudence is developing holistically, and moving away from dualisms.

Perhaps ironically, then, secular law is *not* merely abstract or legalistic in any shallow and transactional sense, nor is it separate from any consideration of relationality. Instead, its operation is closer to concepts such as *tzedakah*, *misphat,* and *torah* than we might think when drawing on our lay understanding of how contracts work and what crime and punishment involve. The punitive, externally applied 'lex' no longer adequately captures the nature or operation of law. Law *can* be viewed as increasingly onto-relational in its operation, and increasingly in its foundation. Non-dualist theories of law are gaining traction in the West, partly as we recognize and learn from the holism inherent in other cultures and systems of law.[46] T. F. Torrance's theological method views law in this holistic and relational

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[44] See James B. Torrance, "Nature-Grace Model of Federal Theology" (Unpublished lecture notes, undated); "Covenant or Contract", 67-68.

[45] T. F. Torrance, *Juridical Law and Physical Law*; See Patrick Parkinson, *Tradition and Change in Australian Law*, 5th edn. (Sydney: Thomson Reuters, 2012); for discussion of Aquinas's influence on natural law theory, see Margaret Davies, *Asking the Law Question*, 4th ed. (Pyrmont NSW: Lawbook Co., 2017), 85–89.

[46] For example, in Australia, First Nations law-ways have always operated holistically, where law is part of being, of identity, of land, of place, and of spirituality (see for example, Irene Watson, "Buried Alive", *Law and Critique* 13, 253-269 (2002). The holism of socio-legal and legal theory developments don't tend to incorporate spirituality.

way,[47] and he would also apply this approach to the resolution of violence.[48] Legal and socio-legal theories are increasingly being conceptualized in a way which holds ontology and epistemology together,[49] and recognizes the place of religious norms and their impact on personal decision-making.[50]

Even where it is not overtly underpinned by holistic legal theory, onto-relational holistic concepts are outworked in the content of many elements of the justice system, which are congruent with relevant Christian faith teachings. Restorative justice, therapeutic jurisprudence, and relational justice are increasingly drawn from to inform both the structure and content of legal responses to crime, including some violent crime.[51] While those processes and concepts are less readily applicable to domestic and family violence, the mainstream sentencing process for

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[47] Torrance, *Juridical Law and Physical Law: Toward a Realist Foundation for Human Law*.

[48] Thomas F. Torrance, "Violence in Society Today: An Examination of the Destructive Forces Inherent in Modern Day Society," *Independent Broadcasting* 13 (1977), 15-18.

[49] See, for example, Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Jennifer Nedelsky, *Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Rhys Aston, "Inviting New Worlds: Jurisgenesis, Anarchism, and Prefigurative Social Change" (PhD Thesis, Adelaide: Flinders University, 2020).

[50] Margaret Davies, "Legal Theory and Law Reform: Some Mainstream and Critical Approaches," *Alternative Law Journal* 28, no. 4 (2003): 168–171; Margaret Davies, *Law Unlimited: Materialism, Pluralism, and Legal Theory* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018); Margaret Davies, *EcoLaw: Legality, Life, and the Normativity of Nature* (London: Routledge, 2022).

[51] Myra Blyth, "Reimagining Restorative Justice — The Value of Forgiveness," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 5, no. 1 (2016): 66; Myra Blyth, Matthew Mills, and Michael Taylor, *Forgiveness and Restorative Justice: Perspectives from Christian Theology* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021); Marilyn Petersen Armour and Mark Umbreit, "Victim Forgiveness in Restorative Justice Dialogue," *Victims and Offenders* 1, no. 2 (2006): 123; Shirley Jülich et al., "Project Restore: An Exploratory Study of Restorative Justice and Sexual Violence," Report (Auckland: AUT University, May 2010); Barbara Hudson, "Restorative Justice and Gendered Violence: Diversion or Effective Justice?," *The British Journal of Criminology* 42, no. 3 (2002): 616–634, https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/42.3.616; Phillip Birch, Conor Murray, and Andrew McInnes, eds., *Crime, Criminal Justice and Religion: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Routledge, 2022); Pamela Anderson, "When Justice and Forgiveness Comes Apart: A Feminist Perspective on Restorative Justice and Intimate Violence," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 5, no. 1 (2016): 113; Barbara Hudson, *Justice in the Risk Society: Challenging and Reaffirming "Justice" in Late Modernity* (Sage Publishing, 2003).

all offences already involves consideration of mitigating factors, rehabilitation, reparations, remorse, and the need to consider ongoing relationships between offenders and victims.[52] Where a victim of crime has forgiven the perpetrator, this, too, can be taken into account. These features of the system are an important part of any justice response which a victim/survivor may find to be restorative as well as protective. The criminalization of many forms of domestic and family violence is itself an expression of denunciation of that conduct which speaks powerfully of the worth of the woman in a way that may be obscured by religious teachings which focus on the indissolubility of the marriage. On this understanding of justice, considerations of personhood, worth and dignity are foregrounded and emphasized, rather than centering legalistic and abstracted demands to forgive in response to wrongdoing.

Consequently, justice is *not* synonymous with vengeance or punishment either in a legal sense *or* in a Christian sense. Reducing our understanding of 'justice' as meaning that someone is vengefully being sent to jail does a disservice both to the reality of the nuances within the justice system and the fullness of the Christian Gospel message, which incorporates justice for victims/survivors. The Gospel emphasizes the person and work of Christ as all-sufficient in establishing and maintaining covenant, and the importance of evangelical, unconditional repentance and forgiveness operating together in order to facilitate justice, restoration and freedom. There is no place in the covenantal Gospel for a shallow, transactional response to the profound wrong of domestic and family violence, which emphasizes legalism (through an abstracted legalistic imperative to forgive) and deemphasizes the worth of the victim of injustice.

[52] David Palmer, ed., *Crime and Justice: A Guide to Criminology*, 5th ed. (Pyrmont: Thomson Reuters, 2016); Penny Crofts, *Criminal Law Elements*, 6th ed. (Chatswood: LexisNexis Butterworths, 2018).

9. Faith-Law Responses to Domestic and Family Violence Against Christian Women: Conceptualizing Christian Teachings Holistically

A faith-law response to domestic and family violence eschews the sacred/secular and public/private divides discussed above and draws on the congruence of legal and faith norms in its conceptualization of justice. Crucially, it would also deal with the third barrier that flows from those conceptualizations, by bringing holistic, ontologically grounded understandings of faith teachings which are applied to the violence. Particularly relevant here are teachings on forgiveness, repentance, and justice.

A highly legalistic abstracted understanding of faith teachings that are relevant to domestic and family violence ironically risks emptying them of the redemptive content, which is most valuable in a theological context. Instead, it presents a parody of forgiveness, repentance and theological justice, which denies the personhood of the victim/survivor (and the perpetrator) and ultimately works against the capacity of the church to respond strongly within the church congregation in these situations. A covenantal understanding of forgiveness guards against it being disconnected from other Christian teachings, and effectively weaponized against women to keep them trapped within their marriage.

This kind of disconnected, legalistic understanding of covenantal obligations is cautioned against in J. B. Torrance's model of socio-political reconciliation, set out below.[53] In a holistic approach, those teachings would be viewed as connected and interrelated, rather than separate or disconnected. Habets has posited this kind of ontological grounding for trinitarian understandings of forgiveness.[54] We see this same kind of holism operating within the nature of a theological covenant in the work of J. B. Torrance, which provides an integrated basis for theological concepts of justice and its interrelatedness with forgiveness and repentance.

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[53] Torrance, "The Ministry of Reconciliation Today: The Realism of Grace;" Torrance, "Reconciliation, Sectarianism and Civil Religion in South Africa and Northern Ireland."

[54] Habets, "'To Err Is Human, to Forgive Is Divine'," 3–16.

10. Theological Covenant as a Basis for Holistic Responses to Domestic and Family Violence

J. B. Torrance's understanding of theological covenant grounds what I am referring to as his principles (or model) of socio-political reconciliation.[55] He does not discuss domestic and family violence in that work, and nor does he discuss actions of individuals, but churches as they engage their communities and attempt to bring reconciliation in the wake of apartheid. Torrance sets out several key principles which would apply to individuals as they attempt to repair the damage done by apartheid. These principles involve understandings of love, forgiveness, freedom, and justice which are Christological, trinitarian and thus covenantal and onto-relational in their operation. I suggest they can be drawn from in developing relevant understandings of the theological issues involved in responding to domestic and family violence. In particular, we see an interrelated movement of how covenantal love and repentance on the part of the perpetrator would operate together in order to constitute one expression of justice.

These principles of justice and reconciliation[56] operate in a way that is integrated and holistic, being an application of Torrance's understanding of theological covenant and his holistic theological method, which is in common with that of T. F. Torrance. As such, J. B. Torrance can be seen here to reject a sacred/ secular and public/private divide, and utilizes an onto-relational understanding of justice itself. These features apply a conceptual holism, which requires teachings to be first, held together and second, expressed relationally. Thus, this work does not divorce considerations of relevant theological teachings from one another but applies them holistically at its practical level. Given this lack of separation between

[55] Torrance, "The Ministry of Reconciliation Today: The Realism of Grace."

[56] The reconciliation J. B. Torrance speaks of here is racial reconciliation. The conditions in which it may be safe to reconcile an interpersonal relationship such as a marriage would be vastly different to those needed for socio-political reconciliation of people who merely live within the same community. In my view his work should not be taken to imply that the Christian response to domestic and family violence mandates that if a husband repents, the marriage must be maintained. That may simply not be safe, possible, or desired. Rather, the personal restoration of each of the spouses should be pursued, and the question of what this may or may not leave open and safe in relation to the marriage should be addressed as a separate issue with qualified professionals.

teachings, for J. B. Torrance, the theological concept of justice is *not* one that is in opposition to notions of love or forgiveness, nor more important than it. He notes, "love without justice is sentimentality."[57] Instead, justice sits alongside the responsibility of unconditional repentance.[58]

A holistic, onto-relational understanding of domestic and family violence and of justice aims to make visible the violence done to the victim, and to provide a conceptual way out, as it were, by enabling her dignity, personhood and freedom from the violence to be actioned as part of the various human service, religious and legal responses to it. Where these responses occur in an integrated way, it would allow for these individual responses to form part of one overarching response which better accommodates all relevant considerations. Importantly for such a framework, Torrance's understanding holds 'love, justice and freedom' together, and views them as interdependent.[59]

A key theological barrier to both pastoral and criminal justice system responses is the potential characterization of domestic and family violence as a private problem of the wife's to solve or take responsibility for, by praying for her husband, modifying her own behavior, or similar.[60] A fundamental and far-reaching corrective to this from within Torrance's work is that he views justice as the responsibility of the perpetrator to bring forward for the victim, and the perpetrator cannot insist on forgiveness being granted to obviate that accountability.[61] This

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[57] Torrance, "The Ministry of Reconciliation Today: The Realism of Grace," 136.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid. See also Richards, "Seeking Love, Justice and Freedom", 275-276.

[60] Tompson Makahamadze, Anthony Isacco, and Excellent Chireshe, "Examining the Perceptions of Zimbabwean Women About the Domestic Violence Act," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27, no. 4 (2012): 721, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260511423239; Jennifer Beste, "Recovery from Sexual Violence and Socially Mediated Dimensions of God's Grace: Implications for Christian Communities," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18, no. 2 (2005): 89–112, https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946805054806; Norman Giesbrecht and Irene Sevcik, "The Process of Recovery and Rebuilding among Abused Women in the Conservative Evangelical Subculture," *Journal of Family Violence* 15, no. 3 (2000): 229; le Roux and Bowers-Du Toit, "Men and Women in Partnership: Mobilizing Faith Communities to Address Gender-Based Violence," 33.

[61] Torrance, "The Ministry of Reconciliation Today: The Realism of Grace," 137.

removes the emotional and logistical burden from the victim of not only ending the violence, or bearing the emotional load of determining responses to it, but also of bringing about behavioral change in the perpetrator in order to continue the marriage.

11. Forgiveness, Repentance, and Justice[62]

Far from being a disconnected and overemphasized teaching, forgiveness does not have its own place in this model. It functions alongside the unconditional repentance which covenant relationship requires of a person who has wronged another. Repentance, and particularly a preparedness to provide reparation, is *a part of justice*. It follows that the provision of justice is the responsibility of the perpetrator. It is not for the wronged party to have to carry the burden of enacting justice. Instead, the perpetrator should commit to seeing that justice is done as part of their commitment to making the situation right. The perpetrator's 'repentance' here is not apology or remorse, and neither is it legalistic or performative. Instead, it involves complete acknowledgement of responsibility, a commitment to change, and to actively supporting the restoration of the victim.

Translated into a situation of domestic and family violence, it may be, for example, that rather than simply apologize for his conduct and perhaps agree to counselling, an unconditionally repentant husband would be obligated to comprehensively acknowledge his violent conduct and commit to doing whatever was necessary to promote his wife's safety and recovery. If they have separated this might include agreeing to attend a different church so that she could be the one who is able to continue to worship in and be supported by her church community. It could include admitting his conduct within the church community so as to safeguard her reputation and avoid her wearing any stigma of appearing to be the spouse who "left" the relationship. If the violence takes the form of a criminal offence and his wife does choose to involve the criminal justice system, I suggest that the repentance and commitment to see justice done, which is required of someone acting in accordance with covenantal obligations, could also extend to the

[62] Much of this section is taken from Richards, "Seeking Love, Justice and Freedom", 275-278.

husband's submission to any requirements of the criminal justice system. This may include adhering to a violence intervention order[63] or pleading guilty to criminal offences to save his wife the stress of giving evidence at trial.

For Torrance, while a Christian person has a responsibility to unconditionally forgive wrongs done to them, and that forgiveness is not contingent on anything else, it nonetheless does not operate in isolation from the repentance and reparations which are brought forward by the person who has wronged them. It is unthinkable that a person in a covenant would fail to ensure that they right any wrong they do against another person because a covenantal obligation of repentance is itself an unconditional one.[64] Torrance notes that the Church must not have vested interests as they listen to victims of oppression.[65] Forgiveness, when improperly emphasized or viewed in isolation from other teachings, cripples the church's 'ministry of reconciliation' by presenting an incomplete parody which perpetuates and indeed amplifies harm and injustice. It must, instead, remain committed to the restoration of the 'full humanity' of both parties: something that a shallow parody of forgiveness profoundly denies.[66]

12. Embodied Justice: A Faith-Law, Holistic Concept of Justice

A staple among scholars and advocates in the domestic and family violence space is the awareness that most solutions to it are outside the criminal justice system. It is understood that justice, when expected from that system, is an elusive concept,

[63] Violence intervention orders, however named, are usually civil orders and not commonly viewed as part of the criminal justice system. They are included here as they are commonly sought by police on behalf of victim/survivors, and are thus associated with criminal justice system engagement.

[64] Ibid., 137.

[65] Ibid.; Torrance, "Reconciliation, Sectarianism and Civil Religion in South Africa and Northern Ireland."

[66] Ibid.

rarely experienced.[67] Two questions, then, remain on the table. First, how might Christian women who are experiencing domestic and family violence be supported to frame their perception and decision making such as to recognize that the criminal justice system can legitimately form part of their response to the violence in a way that is not inconsistent with their faith imperatives, in order to experience both safety and justice?[68] Second, is it possible for justice to occur for Christian women who are experiencing domestic and family violence, even if they do not wish to engage with the criminal justice system formally?

Theorizing domestic and family violence in a holistic onto-relational way enables the presence of key features of justice already within the criminal justice system to be seen. This would enable *their decision-making process itself* to be one which is cognizant of their rights, dignity and need for protection — that is, their worth and personhood as made in the image of God — and profoundly integrative of legal considerations with their faith norms.[69] This would ensure that justice

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[67] Perhaps the best example of dissatisfaction with court outcomes is seen in the area of sexual offending, with hidden incidence, low reporting rates and low conviction rates operating in combination. See Mary Heath, "Lack of Conviction: A Proposal to Make Rape Illegal in South Australia," *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 27, no. 1 (2007): 175–192; Denise Lievore, *Non-Reporting and Hidden Recording of Sexual Assault: An International Literature Review* (Barton, A.C.T.: Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women, 2003); Cassia Spohn, "Sexual Assault Case Processing: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same," *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 9, no. 1 (February 25, 2020): 86–94, https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v9i1.1454.

[68] Though I would argue that the provision of safety from violence, as a response to it, is itself a form of justice where 'justice' is itself defined holistically: ie as the *right response* to that violent conduct. The connection between justice and right-relating or doing what is right is also reflected in theological understandings of justice in the language used for those terms in the Old Testament. This is a key outcome sought by victims also, according to research on victim's perceptions of justice. See Robyn Holder, "Catch-22: Exploring Victim Interests in a Specialist Family Violence Jurisdiction," *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 32, no. 2 (2008): 265–90; Robyn Holder and Kathleen Daly, "Sequencing Justice: A Longitudinal Study of Justice Goals of Domestic Violence Victims," *British Journal of Criminology* 58 (2018): 787; Leslie Tutty et al., "The Justice Response to Domestic Violence: A Literature Review," Report, November 2008.

[69] The principle that justice is 'rights regarding' is an element identified by Hudson. She describes this as having the rights of individuals (and communities) defended. See Hudson, *Justice in the Risk Society: Challenging and Reaffirming "Justice" in Late Modernity*, 206.

considerations could be brought to bear in a structured way, rather than piecemeal, depending on the qualifications of individual social workers or ministers.

In a holistic faith-law response, the women's faith beliefs and the criminal justice system can *together* be seen to profoundly affirm their dignity and personhood and be oriented towards an end goal of ensuring their freedom from violence and its damaging effects. As a corrective to the effects of the violence, bringing these elements explicitly to the fore — particularly denunciation — makes her visibility to and place within the criminal justice system apparent to her. This vindication, too, provides a felt experience of justice — an embodied justice.

What I am referring to as embodied justice here, then, means justice which is genuinely experienced rather than existing as an abstract expectation or potentiality which is imposed externally through the legal system operating in isolation and in a way that is dualist (i.e., conceptualized as separated from faith responses). It involves a holistic encounter of justice rather than viewing justice as a possible criminal verdict which may or may not be sought, and which may or may not be something that can add to the individual's restoration and healing. Further, because the impact of the violence is experienced bodily in the person of the woman, so too is this corrective of justice — it is holistic and onto-relational in its theory and in its specific theological and congruent legal understandings of justice. Where the church leadership and broader community recognize the need for justice, and not only its congruence with other theological imperatives but *its embedded status within those* in an onto-relational conceptualization, they will be better placed to engage with the women in the process of their decision making in a way that further empowers them.

13. Conclusion

The work of the Torrances offers an opportunity to think differently about the relationship between theological responses and legal responses and between theological justice and legal justice. This enables issues of injustice to be approached in a way that aligns theological and legal justice. One of the key strengths of the work of both Torrances, which has been outlined above, is the conceptualization of theological method as requiring an integrated, holistic

approach to theological and pastoral issues. This is seen in T. F. Torrance's adherence to a realist epistemology and his consequential rejection of all forms of philosophical dualism in his methodology. It is implicit in his concept of onto-relations. It is reflected in J.B Torrance's commitment to a vision of the triune God as relating out of theological covenant rather than legal contract, and his work illustrating the capacity of covenantal relating to bring love, justice and freedom.

I suggest the work of the Torrances can be applied to reframe legal and faith understandings of 'justice' as being holistic and integrated, rather than operating separately, and at best parallel to one another. This reframing can be done at a theoretical level, by eschewing dualist understandings of faith teachings and the sacred/secular or law/faith divide itself. It can also be done at a practical level, by providing correctives to various faith teachings which have been identified as potentially constituting obstacles to justice system engagement. I suggest that in this way, an onto-relational conceptualization of justice and domestic and family violence itself can be meaningfully applied to ground responses not merely 'to' the violence, but 'for' the women affected. This shift would further assist in recognizing and meeting the deeply personal effects of the violence, and the devaluation in worth that the experience of such violence implies. It would enable church leaders to engage in an integrated, covenantal, onto-relational faith-law response to domestic and family violence, with deeply restorative potential.

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

A Bridge to Ecumenism

Emmanuel Gergis, Ph.D.

Co-Founder and President, Agora University, Virginia, USA

emmanuel@agora.edu

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

1. Introduction

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

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

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

2. Torrance's Christocentric Empirical Ethos

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

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

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

[3] Ibid., 50.

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

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

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

i. Cosmological: Ptolemaic, Newtonian, and Einsteinian Models

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

Ptolemaic cosmology consists of a sharp dualism where there is disjunction between terrestrial mechanics and celestial mechanics. This cosmological model seeks to escape the terrestrial material reality into the celestial ethereal reality,[5] lending to a gnostic worldview that despised material as a lower state of being and sought to ascend to the heights of celestial ethereal existence.[6] The Ptolemaic model was used by Augustine as the basis of his intelligible versus sensible theology[7] and upon which the totality of Roman Catholic and later Protestant dualistic theology stands.[8] This, in turn, paved the way for the seemingly dualistic understanding of Christology at the Council of Chalcedon developed and articulated

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

[5] Ibid., 21.

[6] Ibid., 38.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[11] Ibid., 23.

[12] Ibid., 147.

[13] Ibid., 72.

[14] Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

[22] Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 15.

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

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

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

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

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

[24] Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

[26] Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 103.

[27] Ibid., 108.

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

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

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

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[29] Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 33.

[30] Ibid., 35.

[31] Ibid., 200.

[32] Ibid., 33.

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

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

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

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

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

[36] Ibid., 62.

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

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

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

[38] Ibid., 24.

[39] Ibid., 27.

[40] Ibid., 29.

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

4. Torrance's View of Early Alexandrian Authors

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

i. Philo of Alexandria

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

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

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

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

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

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

[44] Ibid.

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

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

ii. Clement of Alexandria

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

[46] Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 25.

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

[48] Ibid., 150.

[49] Isaiah 7:9.

[50] Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 130.

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

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

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[51] Ibid., 131.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 135.

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

[55] Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 132.

[56] Ibid., 138.

[57] Ibid., 135.

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

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

[58] Ibid., 134.

[59] Ibid., 140.

[60] Ibid., 164.

[61] Ibid., 150.

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

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

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[62] Ibid., 149.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

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

[66] Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 152.

[67] Ibid.

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

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

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

[68] Ibid., 168.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 170.

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

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

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

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[71] Clement, *Stromata* 5.14.

[72] Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 175.

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

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

iii. Origen of Alexandria

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

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[74] Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 135.

[75] Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[80] Ibid.

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

As described above, there is a remarkable sense of hesitation in Torrance's language in creating a sharp distinction in Origen's thought between the sensible and the intelligible worlds, perhaps suggesting he may have felt a certain pressure to express this opinion. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that Torrance's understanding of Alexandrian theology shifted from his original intuitions and understandings as a result of influence by others.[82] Predominantly, Origen's expression that the visible and corporeal things on earth are copies of true things[83] is a factual statement built upon his ancient Egyptian understanding of the proto-eschatological axis of reality and the fallen contour and his attempts to communicate these ideas to others who understood things dualistically, and does not necessarily constitute any type of dualism. Moreover, Torrance states:

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

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

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[81] Ibid.

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

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

[84] Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 36.

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

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

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

[86] Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 36.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

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

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

[89] Ibid., 37.

[90] Ibid.

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

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

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

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

5. Alexandrian Features in Torrance's Theology

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

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

[94] Ibid., 38.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ii. Unity Between Heaven and Earth

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

[99] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 8.

[100] Ibid., 9.

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

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

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

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[101] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 49.

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

[103] Ibid., 54.

[104] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 66.

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

iii. Piety and Decorum

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

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

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

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

[106] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 28.

[107] Ibid., 267.

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

iv. The Alexandrian Miaphysite Unitary Reality or φὐσις

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

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

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

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

[110] Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

[113] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 202.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid.

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

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

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

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[116] Ibid., 202–3.

[117] Ibid., 203.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

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

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

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

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[120] Ibid., 204.

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

[122] Ibid., 16.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[128] Ibid., 190.

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

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

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

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

v. John Philoponos Extended the Theology of Athanasius and Cyril

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

[131] Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 212.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[134] Ibid., 175.

[135] Ibid., 179.

[136] Ibid., 183.

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

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

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

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

[137] Ibid., 200.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From its inception, the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria has been an educator of theological realism. Clement of Alexandria "spoke of faith as a 'willing assent' of the mind to reality, an act in which the truth of things seizes hold of us and brings us to assent to it in accordance with its own self-evidence."[141] Centuries later, Athanasius and Cyril taught the same doctrine, as discussed earlier. To illustrate how this manner of thinking has been carried through to modern times, we must examine the writings of contemporary Coptic theologians, including Bishop Gregorios[142] and Fr. Matthew the Poor.[143]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[145] Ibid., 5.

[146] Ibid., 6.

[147] Ibid., 7.

[148] Ibid., 11.

[149] Ibid.

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

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

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

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[150] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 83.

[151] Ibid., 207.

[152] Ibid., 83.

[153] Girgis, "The Christological Teaching of the Non-Chalcedonian Churches," 7.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[160] Ibid., 130.

[161] Ibid., 172–73.

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

7. Implications of *Miaphysite* Christology

i. Implications on the Essence/Energy Distinction

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

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

[163] Ibid., 29.

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

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[164] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 107–8.

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

[166] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 37.

[167] Ibid., 107.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid., 176.

ii. Implications on Human Personhood

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

Torrance thinks that "the formulation of our concepts requires constant revision and the concepts themselves require constant reconstruction in the interest of purity of thought as well as advance in knowledge."[175] In light of this appropriate understanding of the use of φύσις and *hypostasis* as truth and concrete reality, and

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

[172] Ibid., 62.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 19.

[175] Ibid., 20.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[177] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 201.

[178] Ibid., 204.

[179] Ibid., 205.

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

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

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

8. Conclusion

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

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

[182] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 105.

[183] Hebrews 1:3.

[184] Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 211.

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

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

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

[186] Ibid., 101.

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

Myk Habets, "The Vagaries of Theology: Thomas F. Torrance and Practical Theology," *Participatio* 12: "The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance" (2024), 175-213; #2024-MH-1. CC-by-nc-sa.

THE VAGARIES OF THEOLOGY:

Thomas F. Torrance and Practical Theology

Myk Habets, Ph.D.

Head of the School of Theology

Laidlaw College, Auckland, New Zealand

President of the Thomas F. Torrance Theological Fellowship

mhabets@laidlaw.ac.nz

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:
>
> 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).

PART II

ESSAY REVIEWS

Victor A. Shepherd, Review of Paul D. Molnar, *The Centrality of Christ*, *Participatio* 12: "The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance" (2024), 217-244; #2024-VAS-1. CC-by-nc-sa.

REVIEW OF

PAUL D. MOLNAR,

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST IN THE THEOLOGY OF THOMAS F. TORRANCE: SOME DOGMATIC IMPLICATIONS

(London: T&T Clark, 2024), 206 pp.

Victor A. Shepherd, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus, Tyndale University
Professorial Fellow, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto
Professor Ordinarius, University of Oxford (UK)
Adjunct Professor, Acadia Divinity College, Acadia University,
Wolfville, Nova Scotia

victor.shepherd@sympatico.ca

In the Preface to his most recent work Molnar states unapologetically, "Today it is generally acknowledged that Thomas F. Torrance was the most significant English-speaking theologian of the twentieth century" (vi), not least because of Torrance's insistence that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, is necessarily "both the first and the final Word in any properly theological theology" (vi). Immediately the reader is alerted to Molnar's conviction that there are theologies that are not "properly theological" but rather are improperly non-theological; i.e., that are deficient, defective, and tainted in that they have debased the gospel and reduced the Word of God to the words of those possessed of "darkened understanding" (Eph. 4:18). These lattermost theologies lack the consistent Christo-logic that Torrance, and Molnar following him, have upheld everywhere in their multi-volume outpourings. Molnar is aware that Christological must be the determinant of proper theology; the merely Christocentric is not, since liberal theology, liberation

theology, natural theology, political theology, and queer theology alike always claim, in their effort to find credibility in the church, to be Christocentric. (One need only to ponder queer theology's extolling of the non-binary Jesus.) All such problematic theologies fail to come to terms with the logic of the Hebrew Bible. That logic is exemplified definitively in the Nazarene as attested by apostles whose understanding of Him He imparted to them, and thereby to the church after them, as He met and instructed them repeatedly between His resurrection and Ascension, thereinafter imparting to them the understanding of Him that He wills the church to have until history is concluded.

Not surprisingly Molnar informs us, "Strictly speaking, this [book] is a constructive work in systematic theology with its main focus on Christology" (vi). A profoundly constructive work in systematic theology, however, will unavoidably be polemical — but this not in a mood of pejorative petulance but always radiant with gospel-attuned remediation. This trajectory is apparent throughout Molnar's book as he finds himself disagreeing with 'non-theological' theologies whose first word is not Jesus Christ but rather philosophy, naturalism, sociology, or the most recent sexual agenda; theologies, therefore, whose final word is necessarily a deviation from the Lord as attested in Scripture and confessed in the church's creeds.

In light of the foregoing, readers of Molnar's earlier volumes could only expect him to uphold and render determinative throughout Torrance's ubiquitous contention that the gift of grace cannot be detached from the giver of grace. Sadly, Molnar regards as an all-too-common skew that distorts everything in its wake the erroneous notion that God the giver gives, to be sure, but does not give Himself. Instead, God is thought to give something, a thing, a benefit, an excellence, a quality, a mind-set, a principle, an energy, without giving Himself in person in the Son He bestows upon us. Even those theologians who rightly recognize that God does indeed give himself to us in his self-communication end up detaching grace from Christ the giver of grace by understanding grace as a kind of quasi-formal causality at work in us. Whenever the identity between Giver and Gift is forfeited in ways such as this, everything that theology discusses is distorted: anthropology, nature, revelation, justification, faith, the Christian life, the law of God and the knowledge of God (vii). Whenever the identity between Giver and Gift is lost, God

remains unreachably remote while grace is invariably reduced because 'thingified' even though it might still be described as the personal action of God. This theme reverberates throughout the book.

While Molnar confronts and corrects assorted 'improper' theologies, his ultimate agenda cannot be overlooked: a Roman Catholic theologian steeped in the Reformational theologies of Barth and Torrance (who alike are indebted hugely to Calvin), Molnar is transparent with respect to his hoped-for outcome; namely, if Protestant and Catholic theologies can allow Jesus Christ to be the *first* and *final* Word, then the corrective which that Word supplies on all fronts would effect an ecumenical rapprochement. For such Protestant and Catholic thinkers, now informed, formed, and normed by the truth of the Gospel (i.e., reality, the force of *aletheia* throughout Scripture) that was nothing less than Jesus Christ, Giver and Gift alike in person, coming upon and forging Himself within those thinkers would shape their theology at every point; such therefore "would be united in their acknowledgement and recognition of the truth of God's being as we actually know God face to face with Christ" (vii).

I

Molnar's book unfolds with three lengthy chapters, the first of which is "Conflicting Visions of Grace and Nature: Appraising the Views of Thomas F. Torrance and Karl Rahner."

Rahner is frequently touted to be the pre-eminent Roman Catholic thinker of the Twentieth Century. Molnar does not shy from meeting him head-on in the interests of exposing Rahner's understanding as non-biblical, non-Christological, and nothing less than idolatrous (even as Molnar avoids this vocabulary). Prior to rebutting Rahner, Molnar begins by exposing and rejecting any notion of infused grace. Following Torrance, Molnar rejects such for several reasons: 'infused' grace suggests a mechanical injection of a substance or material; and infused 'grace' denatures grace as something less than God-in-His-mercy visiting Himself (in his Son, wherein Giver and Gift are identical) upon the spiritually inert, whose predicament before God is otherwise hopeless. Not least, 'infused grace' has traditionally been understood as an initial grace that subsequently grounds that

merit by which humans can claim subsequent grace(s). Not surprisingly, infused grace was also viewed as an 'energizing principle' that boosts human aspiration and renders it an achievement.

Pursuing his standpoint in this matter, Torrance rejects problematic notions of *theosis* as divinizing the human. Here Torrance rejects problematic readings of 2 Peter 1:4 which might suggest that we are "partakers of the divine nature" and consistently advances his view that this biblical statement refers to us as "partners of the Deity" (3). In the same way Torrance disputes the Roman Catholic notion of created grace, since a grace that is "a created medium between God and man"[1] depersonalizes grace and denigrates the sufficiency of the Mediator.

Still anticipating his controversy with several thinkers but especially Rahner, Torrance, says Molnar, consistently eschews any blurring of the distinction between the divine and the creaturely (following Karl Barth) that blends God and the creaturely either through a mysticism wherein divine and human are absorbed into a common being or through a pantheism that regards the divine as the essence of the creaturely.

Reflecting his insistence on the distinction between the divine and the creaturely, Molnar insists we can genuinely know God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) only by faith which for Torrance, following Calvin, means knowledge of the truth. For Torrance, however, it is the truth of *being* and not the truth we think we know indirectly from our supposed transcendental experiences that is thus known. And that being of course is the being of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit such that there can be no division between the object of faith and faith itself. Jesus Christ, who alone bears and bestows the Spirit, quickens in us the faith that seizes Him. Truth, our genuine knowledge of God, is therefore grounded in God and not in any elevated or energized or boosted or elevated aspect of the creaturely. (This lattermost point will loom large in Molnar's disagreement with Rahner.)

Continuing to prepare readers for his comparison of Torrance and Rahner, Molnar discusses Torrance's criticism of Thomas Aquinas. The latter maintains that

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[1] Molnar (3, 39ff.), quotation from Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 140. Throughout this review, page numbers in the text refer to Molnar, *Centrality of Christ.* Molnar's citations of works under discussion may appear in footnotes.

while our intellect can apprehend the nature of God, we assent (the 'Yes!' of faith) not through our understanding of God's being but through a choice we make; i.e., an act of the will which then would make faith rest on moral grounds instead of on the very *being* of God enabling our knowledge of God in the first place. Such thinking became the basis of Kant's separation of faith from its proper object. And for Torrance both Catholics and Protestants tended to open up a gap between our understanding of God from the being of God and an attempted understanding of God based on the will and thus on moral grounds. He also notes that this was what the transcendental Thomists did and because of that they did not overcome Kant's mistake because they grounded their knowledge in transcendental experience rather than exclusively in the very being of God which encounters us in God's Word and Spirit (6ff.). This problematic approach to truth in Torrance's view suggests that we are the ones who "control and manipulate what we know" and as Kant held, we then make that the object of our thought. He also notes that in Roman Catholic thought this opened the door to a phenomenological theology which tended "to be converted into some form of theological anthropology" (7-10). Torrance thus maintains, on the contrary, the knowledge of God arises not through a choice we make, rooted in an innate human capacity, but arises rather as God Himself embraces us, enfolds us in His own life and love, therein 'forges' himself upon and within us so as to acquaint us with Himself, and thereby obviates any suggestion that a human capacity equips us to deduce or conclude or infer who God is. In other words, Torrance, following the Hebrew logic of Scripture, maintains that any deity inferred from world-occurrence or concluded from philosophical speculation is never, because qualitatively different from, the Holy One of Israel. Here, as just noted, is where Torrance rejects what he finds in much Roman Catholic thinking; namely, a phenomenological approach that begins with theological anthropology and claims to apprehend the truth of God and God's ways by beginning with aspects of the human (7). Denied here, he insists, is the uni-directionality of Giver and Gift, heaven to earth, and that revelation which acquaints us with this truth. In sum, Torrance disavows every suggestion of natural theology, however sophisticated, refined, or subtle to the extent that it separates knowledge of God from the being of God which meets us in his Word and Spirit.

According to Torrance faith — by which we are united to Christ and thereby given knowledge of God — is never the outcome, the crown, of any kind of human ascent. Following his insistence on 'uni-directionality,' Torrance insists Christ's prior decision for us alone renders possible and urgent our decision for Him (11). Since our knowledge of God is entirely a predicate of God's grace, to know God is to confess that all human aspiration, speculation, or achievement with regard to such knowledge is not merely ineffective but an affront; it is nothing less than a sinful attempt at self-justification because for Torrance since the Fall, our very free-will is our self-will and there is no way to become truly free apart from total reliance on the freedom of God's grace in Christ enabling us to rely on God alone and not at all on ourselves. Reflecting the testimony of Scripture and the conviction of the Reformers, Torrance avers that the most subtle and most intense expression of self-justification is always and everywhere religious.

One such expression is found in the theology of Rudolf Bultmann, a Protestant whom Molnar discusses in this chapter on Rahner inasmuch as he supports Torrance in Torrance's assessment of Bultmann, who, like Rahner, is a fellow-subjectivist.

According to Bultmann Jesus Christ has done nothing to alter the predicament of sinners before the Holy God. For Bultmann the apostolic testimony to Christ is no more than a literary event that is the occasion of and trigger for an existential self-realization. The meaning of the kerygma has nothing to do with the apostles' declaration of the ontic and noetic significance of the transcendent God's unparalleled intervention on our behalf in the life and ministry of Christ. Instead, the meaning of the kerygma is what it prompts in us as we react to the Gospel story. Christ is the ideational stimulus to our self-realization, our acquisition of authentic selfhood. Here Molnar points out that Bultmann's loss of objectivity concerning God and God's acts attenuates what the apostles attest as God's objective activity among, upon, and within us; not surprisingly, he finds Bultmann's approach indifferent to the immanent Trinity with Bultmann's problematic remark that "we cannot speak of God as he is in himself, but only of what he is doing to us and with us" (15). By contrast [for us], Torrance rightly insisted that "if we can say

nothing about God in himself or about what he does objectively . . . can we really say anything at all of God?" (16).

In deploring Bultmann's subjectivism wherein theological statement says nothing about God *in se*, Torrance is not pretending that theological statement *is* the reality, that truth is ideational (17). At the same time, theology does reflect the logic of God's saving activity which meets us objectively in Christ himself and subjectively through the Holy Spirit uniting us to Christ and thus to the Father. The revelatory (because salvific) event is fraught with noetic significance, apart from which the gospel cannot be either understood (revelation, Molnar insists, while not reducible to the conceptual always pertains to the conceptual) or communicated. In other words, any nonconceptual view of revelation means mythology because, following Anselm Torrance insisted we cannot have experience of God or knowledge of God without concepts.

At this point Molnar is ready to discuss Rahner. Rahner states, "God himself and nothing else is our eternal life, however he may be understood by us here and now."[2] The giveaway, Molnar notes, is "however he may be understood," an understanding that embraces any and all misunderstanding or non-understanding; for such 'understandings' have nothing at all to do with Jesus Christ if they do not begin and end with him as the One Mediator.

Humankind's common experience of mystery, Rahner asserts, is the non-thematic starting point of a saving engagement with God that will be rendered thematic or explicit by traditional categories and vocabulary. Here Rahner has confused (to say the least) the genuine mystery of the created order and human existence with the mystery of God. Because everyone has a capacity for an experience of mystery, says Rahner, everyone has "an obediential potency for revelation and a supernatural existential" (23). Molnar gives a detailed explanation of Rahner's notion of the supernatural existential to illustrate his intention to maintain God's freedom precisely in a way that fails to do so because for Rahner "God's self-communication must be present in every person as the condition which makes its personal acceptance possible" (31). Just this viewpoint allows Rahner to

[2] Molnar (20), quotation from Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 16, p. 236.

turn to us instead of exclusively toward Christ for his understanding of grace and nature. For Rahner, then, any experience of mystery is the occasion of and pointer to our saving receptivity. Jettisoned here is Torrance's biblical/Reformational conviction that we are 'dead in trespasses and sins,' not merely weak or impaired or deficient, and that the noetic effects of the Fall are farther-reaching than the non-noetic effect Rahner endorses. And since such creaturely mysticism can be graced (where grace, for Rahner, is anything but the Gift that is nothing less than because *necessarily* the Giver himself), Jesus Christ has been rendered redundant. According to Rahner humankind's experience of life's mystery is intimacy with God-in-his-mysteriousness; self-acceptance is the same as accepting (albeit unthematically) Jesus Christ.

Beginning not with a humanistic understanding of the human but with an apostolic understanding of Jesus Christ, Torrance insists, "we must allow the Person of Christ to determine for us the nature of his saving work, rather than the other way around."[3] It is not the noble principle of self-sacrifice exemplified in countless people; it is rather the sacrifice of the Incarnate One alone that saves. By ascribing such unthematic awareness to everyone Rahner denies the unique specificity of God's saving acts in their identity with Jesus himself, and consequently an understanding of God as *eternally* Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Rahner's unthematic agenda undercuts the ontic uniqueness (i.e., holiness) of God, the ontic and noetic arrears of the Fall, and the unsubstitutable act of God in Jesus Christ. In short, Molnar agrees with Torrance's assessment that Rahner's constellation fails to overcome Kant and falls into a kind of subjectivism which does not ground knowledge of God in the very being of God but rather in our anthropological (transcendental) experiences.

In the course of exposing Rahner, Molnar targets John Robinson and Paul Tillich. While both these thinkers are Protestant, Molnar discerns Rahner's reductionistic 'unthematic' knowledge of God in them. Both forfeit everything inasmuch as they think about God from a centre in the human instead of from a centre in God. Both begin with philosophical, social, psychological, and cultural understanding of the human and then project it onto God, unaware that they have

[3] Molnar (24), quotation from Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 64.

re-fashioned God in humankind's image. Tillich's notion that God can be understood from our experiences of depth and our ultimate concerns is a blatant instance of such projection. Both begin with a socially determined understanding of the *human situation* (that which the social sciences, history, culture, and philosophy can legitimately describe), and elevate it as the *human condition* which for them is that basis of their view of God, Christ, and salvation. This approach fails to take account of the predicament of guilty sinners before the Holy One who tolerates nothing but acted mercifully for our salvation by giving Himself up to death for our sakes in giving Himself to us without ever giving Himself over to us and thereby collapsing Himself uselessly into us in our self-experience.

Torrance, says Molnar, speaks of the deity Robinson and Tillich advance as nothing less than an idol (26). For where grace is not properly distinguished from nature, idolatry must occur as God, now naturalized, does not transcend the world and therefore cannot judge it as the first step in His saving it. For Rahner, Robinson, and Tillich, what is proposed as a continuum between nature and grace is finally the identity of nature and grace. Molnar comments most tellingly that for Rahner and for William Dych, his major articulator, there is never declared the need for justification as the basis for true knowledge of God and God's grace. And why would there be? No one, after all, needs profoundly to be rendered 'rightly related' (the meaning of 'justification' or 'righteousness') to God by an act of God when everyone is unthematically rightly-related already in their experiences of depth and by means of their ultimate concerns. Indeed, in Rahner's thought, that very problem is evident in his view that grace can be "both utterly free and gratuitous and at the same time an intrinsic part of all human history" (31f.). Again, Jesus Christ has been rendered superfluous.

Foundational to Rahner's approach is his insistence on humankind's desire for God. (Overlooked here, of course, is Scripture's insistence that so far from desiring the One who judges us we flee God, albeit without being able to escape Him because, as Torrance insisted, our very free-will is our self-will and it is that self-will that Christ overcame in his life of perfect obedience for us.) This desire, insists Rahner, is an intrinsic aspect of our humanity, and at the same time nothing less than grace. Rahner characteristically faults those theologies that assume grace to

be "extrinsic." Here, of course, Rahner fails to see that it is not only the human as creature to whom grace is extrinsic (since the Creator as Lord is Giver and Gift) but also the human as sinner (since God is holy and sinners are not). Rahner fails to take account of the predicament of the sinner: an enemy of God, self-contradicted, possessed of an image of God that is never effaced but unrecognizably defaced, and ignorant of God. In this respect Rahner is unaware that as the human heart needs to be renewed wholly by "extrinsic" grace, so does the human mind. For the mind of the fallen creature is 'hardened,' 'veiled,' blinded,' and 'futile' with respect to God, grace, the gospel, and knowledge of such. Rahner is certainly aware of the problem of human sin. But, unlike Torrance, he does not understand sin exclusively from our forgiveness actualized in Christ but rather from an analysis of transcendental experience. By contrast, Torrance held that "face to face with Christ our humanity is revealed to be diseased and in-turned, and our subjectivities to be rooted in self-will. It is we who require to be adapted to Him, so that we have to renounce ourselves and take up the Cross if we are to follow Him and know the Father through Him" (53). This is a crucial and recurrent theme for Torrance because taking up our cross means abandoning every effect to live by our own resources and living by grace alone which means from Christ alone as the one who frees us to love God and thus to love our neighbors. That is why Torrance says we are truly free only when we obey Christ as the one who frees us with his costly grace so that we might not be in search of what he calls cheap grace, that is, a grace which we think we can control and attain by our various attempts to be holy and to reach God by relying on ourselves.

Reflecting all of the above Dych, a major interpreter of Rahner, maintains grace to be "an intrinsic part of all human history."[4] Molnar, following Torrance, recognizes this distortion to be little more than thinly disguised religious romanticism. Rahner's advancing the "supernatural existential" remedies nothing, since it merely renders finite self-transcendence idolatrously confused with the infinite transcendence of God. Not least, Rahner here is guilty of Torrance's *bête noire*, 'conditional' salvation, since we must first will one or another 'depth experience' of our creatureliness. For instance, Rahner claims that "When a person

[4] Molnar (31), quotation from William V. Dych, *Karl Rahner*, 35.

in theoretical or practical knowledge or in subjective activity confronts the abyss of his existence, which alone is the ground of everything, and when this person has the courage to look into himself and to find in these depths his ultimate truth, there he can also have the experience that this abyss accepts him as his true and forgiving security" (33). This is a version of conditional salvation because here salvation depends on us looking into ourselves instead of toward Christ alone to find our ultimate truth. It is Christ who personally forgives us not an abyss that we can experience and rely on such that we can then claim self-acceptance is the same as accepting Christ.

Molnar points out (34) that because Rahner thinks there is a knowledge of God vouchsafed to the creature as such there is a concomitant knowledge of sin — a 'knowledge' that is wholly inaccurate, Molnar insists, since the gift of salvation (grace) alone defines sin and acquaints us with the fact, nature, and extent of our sinfulness. Only the cure can define and acquaint us with our disease. In the light of Torrance, says Molnar, Rahner has everything backwards and thereby false. Only as we encounter the Word of God do we know God (grace) precisely as we have the mind of Christ in knowing God the Father and therein we know ourselves as both sinners and creatures who are indeed forgiven sinners. Because Rahner denies the creaturely to be creaturely only (instead always intrinsically graced), he misunderstands abysmally the creature, grace, and God as Creator (and therefore sole Lord), and God as sole Savior. Consistent with his notion of all sincere (supposedly) human aspiration, Rahner contends that all religion is graced, when according to Scripture religiosity (including Christian religiosity, always and everywhere sincere) is the final and subtlest stronghold of humankind's resistance to grace.

"Infused grace," a major item in Rahner's presentation, suggests a (quasi-)mechanical injection of a substance or an energy. Related to "infused grace" is "created grace," a logical contradiction from Torrance's perspective. "Created grace" for Torrance is merely a form of Arianism because it undercuts the ontological connection between grace and Christ himself as the Giver of grace and that fosters Pelagianism with its attendant notions of co-operation and co-redemption: for what else can be concluded when Rahner adduces, "God in his

most proper reality makes himself the inner-most constitutive element of man"?[5] Torrance held that this is not just a problem in Roman Catholic theology but in Protestantism as well with notions of cooperation with grace that result from theology lapsing into anthropology and subjectivism (41). With regard to Rahner's thinking all of this is confirmed by Stephen Duffy, whose interpretation of Rahner's theological declension continues to dismay Molnar: "Grace, therefore, is experienced, but not as grace, for it is psychologically indistinguishable from the stirring of human transcendentality."[6] Rahner concurs: here in the experience of hope for a definitive end and perhaps even anonymously "one has already grasped and accepted the resurrection in its real content."[7] This approach leads Rahner to explain that grace and revelation can be equated with such experiences of hope for a definitive end so that he can say that this grace "permeates this existence always and everywhere. This grace is revelation in the strictest sense, even if this is not envisaged as coming from 'outside'" (44). This reasoning clearly detaches grace and revelation from Christ himself and is clearly illustrative of the fact that Rahner has sought the meaning of both by looking within human experience instead of exclusively to Christ himself who is the grace of God and the only one who reveals God to us here and now. Molnar is aware that resurrection is the revelation of the sufficiency and efficacy of the Incarnate One's cross-wrought atonement and thus revelation cannot be detached from the risen Lord who is the revelation of God to us and for us. Rightly grasping the logic of Rahner's thought, Molnar concludes, "Rahner's thinking here is confirmed when he claims that self-acceptance is the same as accepting Christ" (46-47).

Whereas Rahner thinks that all human 'depth' experiences and aspirations are unthematic, non-conceptual encounters with God (whose holiness or ontological uniqueness Rahner never discusses in this context), Torrance insists, as noted above, we cannot have a knowledge of God devoid of *some* conceptual awareness.

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[5] Molnar (42), quotation from Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 116.

[6] Molnar (43-44), quotation from Stephen Duffy, "Experience of Grace," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, 48.

[7] Molnar (44), quotation from Karl Rahner and Karl-Heinz Weger, *Our Christian Faith*, 110-111.

God has a name, the name wherewith He has named Himself. We know Him only as we are made aware of His name through His gracious action upon us and within us.

II

In the first paragraph of his second chapter, "Appreciating How T.F. Torrance's View of Justification by Grace Alone Leads to a Proper Theology of Liberation," Molnar states (following Barth and Torrance) that a non-Christological discussion of God can only reflect both idolatry and self-justification (51). Such idolatry and self-justification disclose not merely ignorance of God but enmity with God. Self-justifying idolatry means that by reflecting on ourselves and our social situation we think we can know God, having begun with the erroneous notion that self-reflection yields self-knowledge which in turn is one with knowledge of God. (Already the reader sees that Molnar finds Rahner lurking in current liberation theologies.) All of the foregoing arises inasmuch as there is upheld a metaphysical continuity between the being of the world and the being of God. Forfeited here is the Reformers' conviction that because of sin there is in fact a discontinuity between us and God such that grace does not simply perfect nature (though for Torrance it does that, but not in any Pelagian sense that would suggest that nature is imperfect and just becomes more perfect through grace). Moreover, for the Reformers the being of creation is ontologically distinct from the being of God such that the being of God and the being of the creation are linked only by grace and not by the philosophical *principium* of Being Itself. Forfeited too is the Reformers' insistence that the noetic consequences of the Fall indicate that the truth of God, and, no less, the truth of the human, can only be known as our minds are reconciled through union with Christ. That can only take place by the power of the resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit actualizing in us the objective atonement which took place objectively in Christ the incarnate Word. Molnar does not hesitate throughout his book to endorse Torrance: "It is in the human mind that sin is entrenched."[8] Since the Holy Spirit is the power that Christ bears and bestows, thereby effecting in us that faith which unites us to Him and wherein our 'futile' mind is enlightened with respect to the truth concerning both God and ourselves, it is only through union with him that we are truly liberated to love God and love our neighbors. Liberation

[8] Molnar (54), quotation from Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, 438.

theologies, however, characteristically confuse Holy Spirit (i.e., God) with human spirit (creatureliness). One concomitant of such confusion is the substitution of an ethical agenda ('How can we be/do good?') for an obediential perspective ('Who is given mercifully to us *extra nos* whose legitimate claim upon our obedience is grounded in that Gift?')

Modernity bristles at justification by grace alone because modernity's self-justification amounts to a religious (but not Christian) legitimization of its moral agenda. Such an agenda with its inherent self-confidence approves everything about these agendas, both ideationally and morally, while at the same time remaining ignorant of a gospel-ordained cruciform discipleship in an obedient following of Jesus Christ in person. That discipleship described in Matthew 16:24-26, to which Torrance frequently refers, indicates that it is only in obedience to Christ that we truly abandon our self-reliance which is the essence of sinful behavior.

Even when assorted liberation theologies may not reference Rahner explicitly, they are nonetheless one with him ideationally, for at bottom they maintain that experience of self is simultaneously both experience of God and experience of the neighbor (and the neighbor's victimization). Molnar obviates such manifold error by returning to Torrance's emphasis on the vicarious humanity of Christ, wherein *the* faithful covenant-keeper with whom the Father is pleased gathers up even the sin-riddled obedience of Christians and renders it acceptable to the Father even as the same vicarious humanity renders necessary our own discipleship. It is in that discipleship that true liberation occurs in such a way that we are free for God and thus free to love our neighbors and fight against oppression. For much liberation theology it is presumed that our freedom comes from our fight against oppression and the knowledge of God that we construct from that fight.

In discussing liberation theologies Molnar insists, as he did in his earlier *Freedom, Necessity, and the Knowledge of God*, that God is gender-less. While God has named Himself to us as Father, Son, and Spirit (and we are not at liberty to jettison this name), 'Father' has nothing to do with our experiences of fatherhood whether good or bad, and nothing to do with a supposed projection of them upon 'God.' Here Molnar contradicts such feminist theologians as Elizabeth Johnson.

Molnar rightly observes that all feminist theologies which attempt to rename God project gender onto God. Patriarchy and other expressions of males' abuse of women is not overcome by substituting female projection of names for God for male names, but rather by faith in Jesus Christ in which heart and mind are transformed and thereby enabled to see patriarchalism for the sin it is since liberation in the first instance refers to Christ's liberating us from sin as self-will.

Johnson's related notion that our multiform experience rather than the apostles' attestation of Jesus Christ acquaints us with the truth of God and the truth of ourselves; her insistence here that our experience of "fathomless mystery" is "the condition of acting in characteristic human ways" (84) is one more instance of non-Christian mythology borrowed from Rahner. To no one's surprise, Johnson holds conversion to be not a radical, 'about-face' re-orientation to Jesus Christ and through Christ to the Father but rather women's tapping into the power of themselves wherein they are "inherently in touch with God as holy mystery."[9] Laconically Molnar concludes his opinion of Johnson and renders his verdict concerning her approach to conversion: "Jesus Christ is not even mentioned" (84). In his kind restraint Molnar refrained from exposing Johnson's illogic in her pronouncing God to be "infinite love" (87). If Johnson insists on "naming God with female metaphors… incomprehensible source, sustaining power, and goal of the world, holy Wisdom…," how does she know that God is love at all, never mind infinite love? Only in light of the atonement wherein the Holy One went to hell and back for us do we know God to be infinite love.

Overlooked in all of Johnson's preoccupation with self-referencing is the fact that in experiencing ourselves we experience ourselves as sinners, even as we remain ignorant of our depravity. For this reason, theological articulation in her approach is merely the inflation of our sin-warped (mis)understanding and disobedience, bolstered by our self-confident self-justification. Molnar's final word here is memorable: "Even more importantly the idea that Johnson was basing her views on revelation by claiming knowledge of Spirit-Sophia, Christ-Sophia, and Mother-Sophia as knowledge of the Trinity is beyond ludicrous" (91). It is ludicrous not only because these names for God were in line with the Gnostic heresy but

[9] The quoted phrase is from Molnar (84), as he is discussing Johnson, *She Who Is*, 65.

because they repeat a basic Arian argument by interpreting Jesus not as the incarnation of God but of God's wisdom (89).

Rubén Rosario Rodríguez (*Dogmatics after Babel: Beyond the Theologies of Word and Culture*) concerns Molnar next, for Rodríguez maintains that we can recognize the Holy Spirit in the Spirit's *extra ecclesial* work by exploring liberating activities amidst the concentrations of human oppression and injustice. Lost here, of course, Molnar reminds us, is the Nicene conviction that the Spirit is *homoousios* with the Son and the Father (93). Proffered instead is Rodgríguez' scheme that we can assess which human actions are in fact liberating and which not and predicate the former of the Spirit. Presupposed here, needless to say, is the able historian's sober comment that much presumed liberation turns out to be one bondage succeeding another.

When Rodríguez states he will begin his theology "with pneumatology rather than with Christology,"[10] he cannot by that fact be faulted. Karl Barth, after all, at the end of his career admitted the legitimacy of a "theology of the third person," as long as the Spirit was indeed the power whereby Christ effectuates himself in the church. Lacking this orientation, however, Rodríguez, like Johnson, persistently confuses Holy Spirit and human spirit and separates the Spirit from the Word. Sanctification is then reduced to human achievement rather than Christ's 'benefit' (Calvin) rendering us new creatures in Him. Now human struggles for liberation (a vehicle for and attestation of our sanctification) are nothing less than "historical experiences of God."[11] One such liberating movement is Black Lives Matter: a development admittedly "confession-less"[12] with respect to the catholic substance of the faith but not for this reason, along with similar movements, any less genuinely new *loci theologici*. Here, Rodríguez announces, we may encounter and understand "the work of the Spirit in history."[13]

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[10] Rodríguez, *Dogmatics after Babel*, 142.

[11] Rodríguez, *Dogmatics after Babel*, 169.

[12] Rodríguez, *Dogmatics after Babel*, 172.

[13] Rodríguez, *Dogmatics after Babel*, 172.

Molnar, to no one's surprise at this point in his book, assesses the Black Lives Matter movement, noting that naïve, uncritical persons might find themselves drawn into a movement more concerned with fomenting chaos and hatred of police than in caring for African-Americans. Judiciously Molnar points out that while Rodríguez views Black Lives Matter as standing in the tradition of Martin Luther King Jr., Rodríguez fails to see that King never endorsed the BLM agenda.

Rodríguez' theological aberration is exemplified in his notion of "history as sacrament."[14] Here he maintains that the work of the Holy Spirit can be read off the face of history, "in the religious and cultural 'other.'"[15] Despite his protestation that not any and all that is cultural is revelatory, Rodríguez' divorce of the Spirit from the Son renders him unable to provide the necessary criterion. In claiming to be able to discern those aspects of history and culture that are vehicles or expressions of the Spirit's liberating activity, his self-advertised naiveness is lamentable.

In the same chapter Molnar engages Hanna Reichel, a faculty member at Princeton Theological Seminary, in her dialogue with Marcella-Althaus Reid. Reid (PhD, University of St. Andrew's, Scotland) is a major interpreter of liberation, feminist, and queer theologies. At her death in 2009, at age 56, she was professor of Contextual Theology, New College, University of Edinburgh. At that time she was also the Director of the International Association for Queer Theology, and Director of the Queer Theology Project at the University of Edinburgh. She is best-known for her 2002 *Indecent Theology*. Therein she argued a traditional (for her this amounts to a patriarchal) view of sex supports atrocities everywhere. By contrast, a theology that is considered 'indecent' will no longer venerate and mythologize, for instance, the Virgin Mary. Such mythologizing merely denies the suffering of impoverished Latin American women and hides such suffering in a patriarchally-constructed Christ. An 'indecent' Christ is needed as well, since a gender-specific Christ left-handedly fails to recognize persons with diverse sexual orientations. For this reason, there is needed a Jesus with erased genitalia; Jesus enfleshed to be sure, but not genitally specific. (Barth, Torrance, and Molnar, it should be noted would interject at this point, "Is such a 'person' human at all?") For Reid, a properly

[14] Rodríguez, *Dogmatics after Babel*, 176.

[15] Rodríguez, *Dogmatics after Babel*, 176.

inclusive Incarnation must set forth a bi-sexual Christ. While liberation theologies traditionally have addressed socio-economic disparities (wherein inequities are nothing less than iniquities), they have not addressed questions of gender and sexuality, questions that are related to the conquest of the Americas and subsequent colonizations.

Reichel insists that Althaus-Reid and Barth are compatible. Molnar disagrees. The two women, he insists, never approach Barth's affirmation of God's primary objectivity, the Immanent Trinity. While Reichel never hesitates to speak of 'God,' her understanding of the Holy One of Israel is not Barth's at all. For Barth, truth (reality) is grace, and reality can be apprehended only as grace.[16] Grace and truth cannot be accessed through posited experiences of "queer holiness."

Undeterred, Althaus-Reid contends, "Queerness is something that belongs to God, and… people are divinely Queer by grace."[17] According to Molnar 'queer holiness' and 'queer grace' are inventions that reflect a non-biblical understanding; grace as the content of 'queer experience' is categorically removed from grace as the Triune Giver's (self-)Gift in Jesus Christ (106).

Beyond whatever perspective we bring to the Bible, says Molnar, once we are within the orbit of the biblical witness our perspective is transfigured so as to reflect the logic and the categories of Scripture: sin, law, holiness, grace, etc. Failing here, Reichel's claim that she avoids self-justification is null and void: her elevation of her experience as the criterion of theological understanding is a blatant instance of self-justification. Disdaining conversion as a repentant turning to Jesus Christ, Reichel speaks imprecisely of an epistemic conversion to "an Other" with its attendant "real possibility of a different world."[18]

Predictably Reichel upholds the mind-set of mentors Johnson and Rahner before her of an identification of love of neighbor and love of God with the remark that these "are inextricably intertwined to the point of being co-constitutive, and their ethical intertwinement is preceded by their ontological one" (110). Molnar

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[16] Molnar (104), reference to Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, 23.

[17] Molnar (105), quotation from Hanna Reichel, *After Method*, 95.

[18] Molnar (109), quotation from Reichel, *After Method*, 68.

clearly contrasts Torrance's view of grace, which is directly opposed to any idea that love of God and neighbor is or could be co-constitutive, since any such idea obliterates the fact that grace is God's free unconditional love of us in Christ. It is, as Barth said of revelation in Christ, the condition which conditions all things without itself being conditioned! (Overlooked here, Molnar could have argued, is whether her multisexual agenda is sinful according to Scripture, and therefore whether the neighbor is ever loved where sin is endorsed. At this point Christology is not merely confused with anthropology; Christology is confused with sin.)

James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: Fiftieth Anniversary Edition* (2020), is the last liberation theologian Molnar confronts. In Cone's work the criterion for understanding Jesus is not poverty or social disadvantage or 'queerness'; it is a "black perspective" which leads him to conclude that "truth for the black thinker arises from a passionate encounter with black reality" (114). Claiming affinity with Paul Tillich, Cone avers reality to be that which is the object of our ultimate passion with the result that he thinks "truth is not objective" since it is a "personal experience of the ultimate in the midst of degradation" (114). Despite this undisguised subjectivism in Cone which occurs because instead of allowing Jesus Christ to be the objective truth as the one who frees us for love of God and neighbor, he unhesitatingly speaks of his perspective as truth. His understanding of truth moves him to declaim, "whites… are rendered incapable of making valid judgments on the character of sin."[19] Blacks are (alone) able to make valid judgments. Plainly, then, for Cone theological validity is grounded in sociology and reducible to it. Unwaveringly he intones, "If Jesus is white and not black, he is an oppressor, and we must kill him."[20] Recognizing the phenomenon of a 'Christ' made in our image elsewhere in the history of the church, Molnar sensitively brings forward Torrance's lament that the church, denying the Jewish particularity of Jesus, has regularly depicted him as gentile, conveniently forgetting his self-identification with Israel.[21] For this reason the church has abstracted Jesus from his fulfillment of Israel's God-ordained mission, distorting Jesus by co-opting him for a

[19] Molnar (114-115), quotation from James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 113.

[20] Molnar (115), quotation from Cone, 117.

[21] Molnar (116), reference to Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 105-106.

mission other than Israel's. (Here Molnar could have added that the only physical description we have of Jesus is that he was circumcised; in other words, he was — and is — a son of Israel, apart from which he is nothing to any of us today.)

Lacking the indissoluble unity of Jesus and the Older Testament, Cone's 'Jesus' is one more wax figure to be bent programmatically. In light of such a deficit Cone's comment, "God is present in all dimensions of liberation"[22] is unsubstantial and provides no key to which human agendas and agencies are liberating and which not.

Undiscouraged, however, Cone maintains that "the soteriological value of Jesus' person must finally determine our Christology."[23] Alas, he fails to see that in the history of the church and its theology, wherever soteriology is the basis of Christology (i.e., what Christ is declared to do determines who he is), wanton subjectivism arises with a religious legitimization that fuels an ideological program. Once again, a sociological substratum, from one perspective only, is rendered the criterion of Jesus' work, his person, the church's mission, and all too sadly, the tool for labelling 'non-Christian' if not perverse all who do not share the perspective born of a warped soteriology. Molnar admits that there are some expressions of human oppression that any sane person finds deplorable. Yet it remains possible to recognize and oppose such without any acquaintance with the church's risen Lord. Here Cone has unambiguously departed from the trajectory of the New Testament.

Molnar finds shocking the outcome of Cone's approach: "Looting, burning, or the destruction of white property… can only be decided [i.e., as legitimate because God-ordained] by the oppressed themselves who are seeking to develop their images of the black Christ."[24] Molnar concludes that these remarks should stand as a warning "that the true reconciliation of all humanity can never be achieved by what we do based on the development of our own images of Christ" since such a move "places the power of God in our sinful hands, and that can only lead to more and more conflict between blacks and whites" (124). He concludes that when Christ

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[22] Molnar (117), quotation from Cone, 124.

[23] Molnar (117), quotation from Cone, 126.

[24] Molnar (124), quotation from Cone, 130.

is recognized as the Reconciler and Redeemer then no one could argue that "some people would be justified in destroying the property of others depending upon how they decide to employ their images of Christ" (124).

III

Molnar's final chapter, "A Fine Point in Christology: Discovering Why It Is Important Not to Read the Missions of the Economic Trinity Back into the Immanent Trinity," pursues the most recent (and no less startling) theological development in Bruce L. McCormack's *The Humility of the Eternal Son: Reformed Kenoticism and the Repair of Chalcedon*. McCormack claims to have identified a problem with Chalcedonian Christology and proffers a solution. Molnar, however, insists there is no problem, and McCormack's 'remedy' is fraught with theological error, not least a denial of God's free decision to act savingly on our behalf, therewith a denial of grace, and finally the collapse of the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity.

Here Molnar upholds the crucial congruence between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. The immanent Trinity is God's 'heart,' who God is in Himself. The economic Trinity, God's 'face' in his revelatory/reconciling work among, upon, and within us. Face and heart must be one or God Himself can never be known or trusted, since the 'face' God displays in Jesus of Nazareth might turn out to be a false face. Sinners need to know that what God does for their sake reflects who He is and only who He is; God *is* what God *does*, and God *does* what (who) God *is*. Thus, following Barth, Molnar insists that "we cannot say anything higher or better of the 'inwardness of God' [the immanent Trinity] than that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and therefore that He is love in Himself without and before loving us, and without being forced to love us. And we can say this only in the light of the 'outwardness' of God to us [the economic Trinity], the occurrence of revelation" (81, 135). There is no discrepancy here; more to the point, there is no possibility of any discrepancy: Face and heart are necessarily congruent. God's action embodies God's nature; and only God's nature is exemplified in God's acts. In light of the problem Molnar identifies in McCormack's proposal, Molnar does not hesitate to declare McCormack a "deviant voice" both in the Reformed tradition (especially with respect to Barth and Torrance) and more widely in the church catholic (127).

Molnar begins his critique by quoting McCormack: "What are the ontological conditions in God of the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth should rightly have been worshipped as God?"[25] Positing that the Son's humiliation (grace for us) is already (i.e., pre-temporally) in the Son's generation by the Father is the first step McCormack has taken in the aforementioned collapse. Thus, he claims that the Father generated the Son for the purpose of incarnation "by making incarnation, suffering, and death to be the purpose for which the Father eternally generates the Son" and this assertion follows from his "understanding that the mission of the Son is contained in his eternal generation."[26] From these assertions it follows that "the 'hypostasis' of the Logos has an essential determination for incarnation in Jesus; it is directed towards him and has never been divine alone."[27] Hence, God the Son's nature is "teleologically ordered" and "he was eternally generated for his mission in time and beyond it."[28] And "the self-constitution of God as triune (the eternal processions) is an act teleologically ordered to incarnation and outpouring (the temporal missions)."[29] Expanding this thesis, McCormack contends that unless his 'correction' is adopted, the traditional notion of divine impassiblity leaves us with the notion of God as "'pure being,' 'being itself,' or 'the Absolute'"[30] — a metaphysical conception that blatantly contradicts the church's traditional understanding of God as eternally Father, Son, and Spirit.

Parallel to McCormack's earlier assertion that election is the ground of God's triunity, he now states that his new, corrective ontology (the eternal being of God) requires that Jesus' human history *constitutes* Jesus' being as the second Person of the Trinity. This, because "his mission is built into his eternal generation. *As eternally generated*, he already has a relation to Jesus of Nazareth" (181).

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[25] Molnar (128), quotation from Bruce McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son*, 2.

[26] McCormack, 279.

[27] Molnar (158), quotation from McCormack, 139.

[28] Molnar (181), quotation from McCormack, 293.

[29] McCormack, 286.

[30] Molnar (130), quotation from McCormack, 4.

Here Molnar notes that both Barth and Torrance reject such a notion, replete as it is with both Ebionite and Docetic heresies. Undeterred, however, McCormack proceeds with two subsequent claims: (i) "the eternal Son has an *essential* relation to the personal life of Jesus" [i.e., God is not eternal Father, Son, and Spirit apart from the Incarnation in time], and (ii) "the nature of that relation is best understood in terms of 'ontological receptivity.'"[31]

Molnar notes that with this move McCormack has read the missions of the Trinity back into the processions. This move, Molnar cautions, is huge: does God act savingly as a free exercise of his merciful grace, or is the salvation of the world a necessary aspect of the eternal being of God? If the latter, then creation (it is the created order that is to be saved) is necessary as surely as God's being is necessary: God would not be God without the creation (135). McCormack's proposed 'ontological receptivity' allows the Jesus of history to be the eternal Son of the (so-called) immanent Trinity. And when McCormack equates the Logos *incarnandus* with the Logos *asarkos*, the conflation of immanent and economic Trinities is evident once more.

In a major departure from Barth, McCormack sets aside the patristic insistence on both *enhypostasis* and *anhypostasis*. The latter means that Jesus' human nature has no (*an*) existence independent of the Word who became Incarnate, even as the Word became Incarnate in one (*en*) individual only, Jesus of Nazareth. Christ's flesh exists only in the Word Incarnate, which is nothing less than God Himself reconciling a wayward world and therein revealing Himself as its gracious Savior. McCormack argues that without an 'ontological receptivity,' Barth's Christology is tainted with Apollinarianism (the notion that the Incarnation is a divine mind in a human body, and therefore, absent a human mind, the Incarnate One is not human at all). McCormack thinks to avoid such he needs to claim that, in some sense, the Word was generated from the Father as a "divine-human relation" (149) and indeed that in some sense the human history of Jesus *constitutes* the being of the second person of the Trinity (168-169, 176); and these ideas suggest that the Word was flesh prior to the Incarnation. Here both McCormack's accusation

[31] Molnar (131), quotation from McCormack, 7.

of Barth and McCormack's tendered correction, Molnar declaims, is wide of the mark, his 'ontological receptivity' negating the immanent Trinity (138).

McCormack thinks that Chalcedonian Christology supports an impassibility in God that renders God incapable of suffering. But Molnar notes that Torrance, on the other hand, maintains a proper impassibility that supports and includes a salvific passibility; Christ's cruciform life illustrates that God is capable of genuine suffering (passible) without such suffering 'bending' God away from His nature or deflecting Him from His purpose (impassible) of overcoming sin, suffering, evil and death for us. A purely passible deity, after all, could only change into non-God, a manifest absurdity; a purely impassible deity, on the other hand, could never have 'tasted death' for our sakes.

Rejecting McCormack's theological deviation, Molnar unhesitatingly admits that the Incarnation (and with it the creation) is a genuine *novum* in God's own life, even as the Son's relation to the Father is eternal (140). This *novum* (mission) entails God's passibility, even as God's eternal nature remains unalterable or impassible (procession). The problem that McCormack attempts to solve by his theological novelty is no problem at all; his supposed solution, however, is.

As mentioned earlier, McCormack faults Barth for maintaining the *enhypostasis/anhypostasis* distinction "in its traditional form."[32] This traditional distinction, McCormack insists, is both unneeded and deleterious since Jesus' human existence constitutes him the eternal Son of the Father.[33] Right to the end of his monograph McCormack sounds the same note: "it is, in fact, the eternal Logos who is the one true God-human both in eternity and in time"[34] — lest God not be fully God eternally nor fully love eternally, McCormack reminds us. By contrast, Molnar points out that if the humanity of the Son is eternally preexistent, and if the Son is generated by the Father for the purpose of incarnation as McCormack argues by having read the missions back into the processions, then the Son is no longer truly human, and the action of God upon a fallen creation is no longer grace. The

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[32] Molnar (155), quotation from McCormack, 118.

[33] Molnar (156), discussing McCormack, 119.

[34] Molnar (158), quotation from McCormack, 261.

result, concludes Molnar, is that McCormack has compromised both the deity and the humanity of the Son (162).

Molnar's final discussion of *en-/anhypostasis* ringingly endorses Torrance's interpretation. Torrance insists both are needed. The Word became Incarnate in history by assuming our sinful humanity into union with his divine being in the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth without ceasing to be God and thus without himself sinning. As the one mediator Jesus was the historical agent of our salvation and not merely an instrument of revelation or reconciliation.[35] From the divine and human side Jesus reconciled us to God personally such that reconciliation was no mere legal transaction but an act of God *as* man for us. In his life of perfect obedience Jesus himself is our reconciliation. In short, the Incarnation means that the earthly ministry of Jesus was redemptive from the outset — not in such a way as to render the cross superfluous, but always and everywhere in anticipation of that cross whose reality rendered the earthly ministry saving. Jesus Christ, who can legitimately say, "Which of you convicts me of sin?" (John 8:45), mercifully identifies Himself with sinners as he is "reckoned with transgressors" (Luke 22:37).

The logic of the foregoing means that the entire earthly ministry of Jesus is sin-bearing. Since Jesus is God-Incarnate, His humanity is not merely instrumental, not merely a tool wielded by the Father. Neither is the cross merely forensic. Rather, the cross, together with the ministry of Jesus, is God-in-His-grace (the Giver in the Gift) restoring fallen humanity as *the* faithful human covenant-partner, as the Gift, in his vicarious humanity, assimilates to Himself our covenant-breaking humanity, thereby renewing it. Now identified with Jesus Christ, we are those granted access to the Father and resplendent before Him.

Although McCormack claims not to make the Incarnation essential to the Son as Son, Molnar insists McCormack indubitably has done just this; i.e., he rejects the Logos *asarkos* as understood by the church catholic in his tireless reiterations that the eternal Son is 'preexistent' as 'composite.' Excluded here is any notion that God has freely decided to act savingly on our behalf; grace is not gracious at all but is merely a necessary development resulting from the Son's "ontological receptivity."

[35] Molnar (173), with reference to Torrance, *Incarnation*, 232.

Any such ontological necessity denies the freedom of God's grace with the claim that "the *true* Logos *asarkos* was never without a determination for incarnation" because "he was already, as generated by the Father, a 'composite' entity in anticipation of the incarnation to come" (177). Moreover, since for McCormack "The eternal act in which God gives to himself his own being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the eternal act in which God chooses to be God in the covenant of grace is *one and the same act*" (182) he is unable to agree with Torrance, following Athanasius, that both creation and incarnation are *new* acts, new even for God. Strictly speaking, in McCormack's thinking, there is no longer a genuine Giver; and neither is there a genuine Gift. What the church fathers cherished regarding the immanent Trinity — the God who is eternally Father, Son, and Spirit, and who needs nothing and no-one to be and remain who He is — this God has in His incomprehensible mercy and love given Himself up to suffering, degradation and death for disobedient, defiant, perverse, ungrateful sinners. The wonder and glory of the grace disclosed in the economy of our salvation is finally dismissed in McCormack's pronouncement, "the preexistent Logos *as such* is a pure postulate, a human invention, alleged to be complete in itself without regard for its activity *ad extra*… an 'idol' by any other name."[36]

Molnar is unashamed to be identified with his Lord, with the free and gracious act of God in the accomplishment of our salvation, and with the truth that the heart of God (immanent Trinity), never collapsed into the face of God, not only does not differ from that face (economic Trinity) but cannot. Taking his stand here he will gladly bear the reproach of 'idolatry', with his belief in and espousal of the Logos *asarkos*.

Molnar is eager, however, not to stand alone. He concludes his book where he began:

> "My goal was to illustrate that there could be substantial agreement between Roman Catholics and Protestants regarding such crucial themes as nature and grace, revelation, theological anthropology, and the doctrine of God… if and to the extent that they allowed Jesus

[36] Molnar (181), quotation from McCormack, 253.

Christ in his uniqueness to be the first and final word in their theology" (185).

Conclusion

Paul Molnar's book discusses thinkers of diverse denominational commitments, eras, political contexts, and genders: Lutheran (Bultmann and Tillich), Anglican (Robinson), Reformed (Reichel and McCormack), and Roman Catholic (Rahner, Johnson). Molnar's exposition spans decades as well, from the 1920s to contemporaneity. Yet he finds all whom he surveys alike lacking the theological (i.e., Christological) profundity and penetration reflected in the work of Thomas F. Torrance.

Torrance insists, following the logic of Scripture, that we can know God only by being included in God's self-knowing. And we can be included in God's self-knowing only as we are united to the Incarnate Son by Spirit-quickened faith. Throughout the book Molnar exposes how beginning anywhere else entails a denial of God's objectivity, since the immanent Trinity is then invariably collapsed into the economic Trinity, with the result that an effect or benefit or blessing may be a gift of God but never the gift of God Himself since for Torrance grace cannot be detached from Christ, the giver of grace.

Repudiated throughout is any notion that we may begin with human experiences of whatever sort, and then conclude something about God and our involvement with Him. Without explicitly naming the Hebrew logic of Scripture, Molnar is aware that the characteristic of the living God is that He acts and speaks in Son and Spirit — and therefore that any deity who is concluded, inferred, or deduced by thinking from a center in ourselves is *ipso facto* an idol. For this reason Molnar indicates how it is that any theology that begins anywhere but with Jesus Christ as God's *first* and *final* Word turns people back on themselves, confuses God's speaking and acting with their own, and substitutes a deity made in our image for the God who is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not least, Molnar exposes the theological weakness of confusing processions with missions: while the Son is appointed to become Incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth for our salvation (mission), the eternal generation of Son (procession) can neither be reduced to the

mission nor can the missions be read back into the immanent Trinity; otherwise the mission is said to constitute the Trinity, and the eternality of God's Triune objectivity is surrendered.

While the book's articulation is precise and its argumentation unexceptionable, the mood of the book is never caustic. Its critical note always subserves the book's purpose; namely, a magnification of the astounding gift of grace that is nothing less than the giver Himself. Readers will be reminded that for this reason there will always be more mercy in God than there is sin in us; and Christ's grip on us His people will ever be stronger than our grip on Him.

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Philip G. Ziegler, Ph.D.

Professor of Christian Dogmatics, University of Aberdeen

p.ziegler@abdn.ac.uk

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