

Communion with the Triune God

*The Trinitarian Soteriology
of T.F. Torrance*

Dick O. Eugenio



Communion with the Triune God

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Communion with the Triune God

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of T.F. Torrance*

Dick O. Eugenio



James Clarke & Co

*To Mary Ann and Heloise,
the two ladies of my life*

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ISBN: 978 0 227 17453 1

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A record is available from the British Library

First published by James Clarke & Co, 2014

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Published by arrangement

with Pickwick Publications

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Foreword

IT IS COMMONLY SAID THAT THE LAST SEVENTY YEARS OR SO HAVE SEEN a Trinitarian revival and the credit for initiating this usually goes to Karl Barth and Karl Rahner. It is certainly true that the doctrine of the Trinity suffered an eclipse during the high point of Enlightenment modernity. “Religion” was reduced to the cardinal points that would be accepted universally by all “reasonable” people irrespective of culture, tradition, and background: that there was one God, the designer of the universe, that he was the source and guarantee of the physical and moral order, and that he would reward the good and punish the wicked in the hereafter. All the great religions of the world, including Christianity, could be boiled down to this one central affirmation now being set forth as the world was finally and joyfully “enlightened” by this oh-so-reasonable creed of Deism. That God was a Trinity, that one of the persons of the Trinity became incarnate in Jesus Christ, and that Christ died to make atonement for the sins of the world—these assertions peculiar to the Christian tradition could be set aside. At best they were marginalized in the deistic faith of many who still thought of themselves as part of the church. The atonement was a piece of primitive superstition, the incarnation was some kind of myth, and the doctrine of the Trinity was a self-contradictory conundrum.

In the nineteenth century, as deism collapsed into atheism, Hegel seemed to offer a revived Trinitarianism. But, of course, the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity were merely illustrative of the way in which the Absolute Spirit had realized itself in creating its opposite, creation, and then in realizing itself in entering into a new synthesis with creation through the process of world history. Such a confusion of the generation of the Son with the creation of the world had not been seriously mooted in Christian thought since before Nicaea. Meanwhile traditional Catholics and Protestants continued to affirm their belief in the Trinity, but the doctrine seemed to be rather esoteric, abstract, confusing, and irrelevant to the life and mission of the church.

Given then that Hegel was reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity as an illustration of his own philosophy, and that orthodox Christians

clung to it merely as a badge of orthodoxy, it appears to be true that the real revival of the *church* doctrine of the Trinity did not come till the mid-twentieth century. Barth re-formulated it in terms of the concept so central to the church's response to the epistemological challenges of the Enlightenment—revelation. "God reveals himself as Lord." And so this one God is the Revealed, the Revealer, and the resulting Revelation. Rahner tackled the problem that the doctrine of the Trinity seemed to be irrelevant by questioning the divorce in Christian theology between the "Immanent Trinity" and the "Economic Trinity." Rahner's "rule" (as it was called) insisted that the Immanent Trinity *is* the Economic Trinity and the Economic Trinity *is* the Immanent Trinity. But that was rather ambiguous. Did this mean that God did not exist as Immanent Trinity apart from the world? Another Catholic theologian, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, did not hesitate to affirm that that was what we had to say to end the irrelevancy of the doctrine of the Trinity. But the ghost of Hegel seemed to be hanging around.

There was another line of development. Rahner criticized the tendency to make the unity of God more fundamental than God's being as the Trinity. But this line was taken further by a reaction against what was seen to be the "single subject" God of Barth or Rahner. Was this not still influenced by Augustine in its overemphasis on the *one* God? They were not then Trinitarian enough! The development of the "social analogy" for the Trinity has therefore been presented as a correction to the whole Augustinian tradition of the West in which (it has been said) Augustine's "psychological analogy" has been too dominant. The resulting strong emphasis on the unity was said to be characteristic of the Latin West (according to the de R gnon thesis), while the Greek East began instead from the three.

The "social analogy," which has been seen as the counter to this Augustinian "psychological analogy" and the strong Western bias to unity, was actually introduced at the same time as Barth's revival of the Trinity, by some rather forgotten Anglicans, Leonard Hodgson and Charles Lowry. Hodgson speaks of God as a "divine society" and Lowry goes so far as to refer to the three persons as "three centres of consciousness." But the so-called "social analogy" only came to the centre of discussion as similar perspectives on the doctrine of the Trinity were put forward by J rgen Moltmann and John Zizioulas. Moltmann's Trinitarian theology began in truly Lutheran fashion as a *theologia crucis*. If Moltmann's Trinitarian theology makes the Trinity relevant by portraying the God who suffers with

us, Zizioulas makes the doctrine relevant by his account of how the Cappadocian theologians were the source of a new ontology of personhood. Our understanding of personal relationships can be seen to be grounded in Trinitarian theology. The unity of the Three Persons is not to be understood by some Greek metaphysical idea of impersonal substance (*ousia*), but their unity as the one God consists in their inter-personal communion (*koinonia*). But Zizioulas's doctrine contrasts strongly with Moltmann in that, while they both accentuate the distinctions among the persons, Moltmann moved increasingly under the influence of his political and social egalitarianism to emphasize the equality of the Three and to reject any kind of precedence or order.

But more recently, the various differing understandings of the "social analogy" have come under fire. While philosophical theologians such as Cornelius Plantinga and Richard Swinburne are sympathetic, others such as Michael Rae and Brian Leftow have been critical. Among other leading theologians, Colin Gunton (sympathetic to Zizioulas but not to Moltmann) wrestled with the relation of Trinitarian doctrine to the doctrine of creation, and Robert Jenson has wrestled with the relation of the Triune God to time. But Stephen Holmes has argued that the contemporary "revival" of Trinitarian theology has not been a "revival" at all, but is in fact quite at variance with the Trinitarian theology of the Fathers.

In this context, the Trinitarian Theology of Thomas F. Torrance deserves the attention of the church. Far from devising a doctrine of the Trinity crafted to speak to contemporary debates (reason and revelation, relevance to the life of the church, God and suffering, human personhood), Torrance's theology begins with a deep understanding of the Fathers. It is not that he simply recovers their thought in the supposedly detached and neutral way of the historian, but neither does he begin from contemporary issues. He begins with the Trinitarian thought of the Fathers, not read superficially in order to find support for contemporary causes, but read *theologically* in order to discern their deep structure and inner logic. This Trinitarian theology is then seen to speak powerfully to the church in every age, and particularly the contemporary church.

A number of major accounts of Torrance's theology have now been published by Alister McGrath, Elmer Colyer, Paul Molnar, and others, and an increasing stream of doctoral theses is examining different aspects of his thought. This book is based on a first-class thesis in which Dick Osita Eugenio shows the profound coherence and integration between Torrance's doctrine of the Trinity and his doctrine of salvation. These two

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areas of Christian theology are often held apart, but Torrance has a deeply soteriological doctrine of the Trinity and a deeply Trinitarian soteriology. While Trinitarian theology no doubt has much to say to concerns about reason and revelation, the mission of the church, human personhood and personal relations, God's relation to the creation, and the suffering of the world, Torrance's exposition of the doctrine relates it primarily and profoundly to the gospel. This book makes a significant contribution not only to our understanding of Torrance's thought but to the contemporary need of the church to grasp at a deeper level how the salvation of the world is being accomplished by the Triune God, and to live in alignment with the mission of the One who is eternally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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Preface

SOTERIOLOGY HAS ALWAYS FASCINATED ME. I RECALL THAT EVEN AS AN undergraduate student, my most interesting conversations and debates with others revolved around this theme. As one who has received his theological education from Wesleyan institutions, discussions about and around the *ordo salutis* were an anticipated part of classroom interactions and informal conversations. And although the Calvinism-Wesleyanism soteriological division has degenerated to a cliché a long time ago in my theological and ministerial life, I am not surprised that it is still receiving increasing scholarly attention. There will always be new nuances that will be discovered, which in turn will open up new discussions. This immense assiduity to soteriology is bound to continue, so long as the gospel is directed to humanity and so long as theologizing desires to be relevant in the life of the church. History reveals that the greatest theological revolutions that transpired within the two millennia of Christianity—such as the formation of the creeds during the patristic era and the Reformation of the sixteenth century—were about the doctrine of salvation. Soteriological formulation will always remain central in both the reflective and practical dimensions of the life of the church.

My enduring enthrallment with soteriology received even greater impetus after attending a class at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester in 2007 that sketched the doctrine of holiness in light of the being and work of the Triune God. To me, such a procedure generates important biblical and theological implications that provide answers to the gaps created by merely pragmatic and experience-based formulation of the doctrine. Immediately, this exhilarating discovery planted doubts in my heart whether pursuing what I originally planned to write for my doctoral thesis—i.e., a comparison of John Wesley and Karl Rahner on their theologies of grace—remained the best way forward. I am now very pleased that I followed the dictates of my heart, for my interaction with Thomas F. Torrance's Trinitarian soteriology, as I anticipated, provided exhilarating new insights into what it means to be saved.

Preface

This project would never have materialized without those who sponsored my post-graduate studies, including the Church of the Nazarene—Asia-Pacific Region, Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Nazarene Theological College (Manchester), and all other institutions and personalities (some even unknown to me). My special thanks to Dr. Floyd Cunningham, a wonderful *ninong* and friend, for the confidence he has in me. Also, Brooklands Church of the Nazarene has been my church while in Manchester. That I served there as the youth minister while doing my studies also deepens the love I have for the church, its ministries, and its people. I thank the minister, Rev. Karl Stanfield and his family who were always welcoming, and members of the church who were very supportive and caring.

I was blessed to have been under the supervision of Dr. Thomas A. Noble, who, in the midst of his busy-ness, was always prompt in responding to my inquiries and returning my work. He has been extremely helpful from the beginning of my thesis. When finally I submitted my whole draft to him and he said “I will be looking for chaotic features in here,” I laughed, but I knew that that was what he was going to do. Also, because he has been a student of Thomas F. Torrance himself, a mystical bond, if I were permitted to say so, mediated through him, between me and the theologian I am writing about is certainly a source of joy. I always jokingly mention at every available opportunity (and will most probably continue to do so) of the “historical succession” that runs from Barth to Torrance to my supervisor to me. All the faculty, staff, and co-students at NTC were also supportive and generous since I came to the UK. The familial bond shared within the community is very special. The faculty were very helpful to me as an international student. And of course to my fellow PhD students and friends who gave me inspiration and companionship, thanks. In the preparation for publication of this monograph, Marie Joy Pring, my student at APNTS, also helped in formatting the final manuscript.

I also thank God for giving me a most understanding wife, companion, ministry partner, encourager, friend, and sponsor, Mary Ann. Her support, patience, and companionship made this journey certainly lighter and more enjoyable. The love, happiness, joy, and laughter we share are antidotes to doubts and discouragements along the way. Our daughter, Heloise, is another angel to me. She is, and will always be, dearly loved. She is the creaturely *vinculum amoris* of my happy family. And most importantly,

Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him I, a creature here below
Praise Him above, joining the heavenly hosts
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.¹

1. Personalized and revised version of The Doxology, written by Thomas Ken (1637–1711).

Abbreviations

<i>Adel.</i>	Athanasius, <i>Ad Adelphium</i>
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325</i> . Reprint. Edited by Alexander Robertson and James Dolandson. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004.
<i>CD</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> . Karl Barth. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956–75.
<i>C. Ar.</i>	Athanasius, <i>Orationes contra Arianos</i> (<i>Orations against the Arians</i>)
<i>C. Cel.</i>	Origen, <i>Contra Celcius</i> (<i>Against Celcius</i>)
<i>Cat.</i>	Cyril of Jerusalem, <i>Catechetical Lectures</i>
<i>Dec.</i>	Athanasius, <i>De Decretis</i> (<i>Defence of the Nicene Council</i>)
<i>Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus haereses</i> (<i>Against Heresies</i>)
<i>In Ill. Om.</i>	Athanasius, <i>In Illud Omnia</i>
<i>Institutes</i>	<i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> . John Calvin. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960.
<i>NPNF</i> ¹	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> . First Series. Edited by Philip Schaff. Reprint. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
<i>NPNF</i> ²	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> . Second Series. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Reprint. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
<i>Ser.</i>	Athanasius, <i>Ad Serapionem</i>

Abbreviations

<i>Sp. Sanc.</i>	Basil, <i>De Spiritu Sancto</i> (On the Holy Spirit)
<i>Strom.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromata</i>
<i>Syn.</i>	Athanasius, <i>De synodis</i> (<i>On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia</i>)
<i>Trin.</i>	Augustine, <i>De Trinitate</i> (<i>On the Holy Trinity</i>)
<i>Ver. rel.</i>	Augustine, <i>De Vera Religione</i>

Introduction

ELMER COLYER AND ALISTER MCGRATH EXTOL THOMAS FORSYTH Torrance as one of the premier theologians of the twentieth century, particularly in the light of his voluminous works and contributions on the relationship between science and theology, ecumenism, and trinitarian theology.² Torrance was born in West China on August 30, 1913 to missionary parents, which explains his heart for evangelism and evangelizing theology. In 1927, around the time recession hit the world, the family returned to Scotland and Torrance pursued his education in Scotland. At New College, Edinburgh, while doing his Bachelor of Divinity, he studied under Hugh Ross Mackintosh, who introduced him to Karl Barth's theology. In 1937 he won a scholarship that provided him the opportunity to be under Barth's supervision while writing his thesis, later published as *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (1946). It is not an exaggeration to conclude that the lifelong and prominent themes of Torrance's theological *oeuvre*, namely: Trinitarian theology, engagement with science and emphasis on scientific theology, and commitment to patristic theology, were fuelled by his engagement with Barth. In some areas, however, Torrance has surpassed Barth, such as his engagement with the natural sciences, which won him the Templeton Prize for the Progress in Religion in 1978. Torrance died on December 2, 2007, eighteen years after his retirement from New College as the Professor of Christian Dogmatics.³

Among Torrance's accomplishments as theologian, philosopher of science, and churchman is his consistent trinitarian theology. As such, he deserves Paul Molnar's assessment of him as a "theologian of the Trinity."⁴ The doctrine of the Trinity not only permeates Torrance's large theological

2. Colyer, *How To Read*, 11; McGrath, *An Intellectual Biography*, xi.

3. For Torrance's biography and introduction, see McGrath, *An Intellectual Biography*; Hesselink, "A Pilgrimage in the School of Christ," 49–64; and Noble, "Thomas Forsyth Torrance," 823–24. See also the several eulogies and recollections in *Participatio* 1 (2009) 6–48.

4. Molnar, *Theologian of the Trinity* (2009).

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corpus, but is the consistent “ground and grammar” of his theology.⁵ Even his ecumenical engagement with other theological traditions is fuelled by this biblical and patristic doctrine, particularly evident in the two volumes of the *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*. It is not an exaggeration to say that as a *Christian theologian*, the doctrine of the Trinity is the *canon* by which Torrance engages theological traditions (including his own), and approaches and formulates his whole theological program. As Eric Flett writes, “no particular feature of Torrance’s theological project can be understood apart from a deep appreciation of [the truth of the Trinity].”⁶ Consequently, presentation of any aspect of Torrance’s theology should be evaluated through Torrance’s own hermeneutical dictum that the Trinity is “the ground and grammar of theology.”

The primary interest of this book is Torrance’s soteriology, but it could not but be a trinitarian soteriology. For Torrance, the doctrine of the Trinity is always soteriological and soteriology is always trinitarian. To isolate one from the other means to separate the being of God from his act, and *vice versa*. Elmer Colyer’s *How to Read T. F. Torrance* and Paul Molnar’s *Theologian of the Trinity* are excellent publications offering a comprehensive presentation of Torrance’s doctrine of the Trinity.⁷ But although there are sections in these books where soteriology is discussed, there is a discernible lack of *explicit* connection between Torrance’s doctrines of the Trinity and salvation that Torrance himself asserts. The distinct contribution of this book, therefore, is that, building on Colyer’s and Molnar’s fine works, it consciously presents Torrance’s soteriological Trinity and trinitarian soteriology at the same time. In this book, *soteriological Trinity* refers to the fact that Torrance’s doctrine of the Triune God is always a God *with* and *for* us. The being of God is inseparable from his acts. As such, even presentations of each of the Persons of the Triune God require a soteriological outlook: there is no Christology which is not soteriological Christology, there is no Pateriology which is not a soteriological Pateriology, and there is no Pneumatology which is not soteriological Pneumatology. Reciprocally, *trinitarian soteriology* here means that (1) salvation is the work of the Persons of the Triune God, and that (2) because, in addition to (1), salvation is grounded in the being of the Triune God, (3) the ultimate *telos* of salvation is relationship with the Triune God. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 present the works of each of the Triune Persons, arguing

5. Torrance, *Ground and Grammar of Theology* (1980).

6. Flett, “Persons, Powers and Pluralities,” 220.

7. Colyer, *How to Read* (2001); and Molnar, *Theologian of the Trinity* (2009).

that all three Persons are soteriologically involved in the mediation of reconciliation. In these chapters, it will be argued that Torrance employs a *kath hypostasin* trinitarian soteriology, or that the Persons of the Trinity fulfil distinct agencies in the salvific economy in strict accordance with their hypostases as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It will also be argued that the distinct works of the three Persons are the works of the whole Triune God, and thus the *telos* of their specific salvific agencies find culmination in humanity's participation in the life and love of God's communion. Secondly, chapter 5 presents the being and work of the communion of love that God is, and it will be argued that Torrance employs a *kat' ousian* trinitarian soteriology, or that the origin and *telos* of salvation are in strict accordance with the being of God as personal communion.

Inasmuch as Torrance's doctrine of the Trinity is soteriological, this work also argues that his soteriology is a *Trinitarian soteriology* and nothing else. As such, presentations of Torrance's soteriology that fail to be fully trinitarian should be revised and reformulated in order to do adequate justice to Torrance. Most of the studies of Torrance's soteriology focus on Christ, and to a certain degree, these works faithfully depict Torrance's christocentric theology. It is beyond doubt that one of the many contributions of Torrance to contemporary theology is the recovery of the Irenaeus-Athanasius axis of incarnational redemption. Kye Won Lee's *Living in Union with Christ* and Peter Cass's *Christ Condemned in the Flesh* are examples of the fascination with this significant Torrance soteriological distinctive.⁸ The question, however, is whether or not these studies do sufficient justice to Torrance's more holistic and trinitarian orientation. The danger that lurks in this microscopic analysis, especially owing to Torrance's integrative approach, is that it can lead to serious misinterpretations. Man Kei Ho's *A Critical Study on Torrance's Theology of Incarnation*, for instance, is an unfortunate cornucopia of awkward theological critiques because it only looks at one aspect of Torrance's thought while evaluating it from many sides.⁹ If Ho had approached the incarnation primarily in the light of Torrance's trinitarian soteriology, his conclusions would have been different. The study closest to Torrance's trinitarian soteriology is Myk Habets's *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas F. Torrance*.¹⁰ Habets rightly discerns that the origin and *telos* of salvation is participation in the life and love of the Triune God. He also takes on board the works of the incarnate

8. Lee, *Living in Union* (2003); and Cass, *Christ Condemned Sin in the Flesh* (2009).

9. Ho, *A Critical Study* (2008).

10. Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (2009).

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Son and the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation. In terms of a robust trinitarian soteriology, however, its weakness lies in the absence of a fuller treatment of the Person and work of the Father, which this book provides. Ultimately, this book is a contribution to the increasing number of interpretations of Torrance's soteriology. It is not intended to stand on its own, and because it seeks to address certain elements which I deem neglected in other writings, it has its specific foci—foci which the author hopes to have important bearings in Torrance scholarship.

Torrance's trinitarian soteriology could be explored and elaborated from various angles. This book, however, is concerned mainly with two things, namely (1) the specific works of the Persons of the Triune God in Torrance's trinitarian soteriology, and (2) the *telos* of being saved by the Triune God, respectively. On the first, Torrance's trinitarian soteriology is informed by his insistence on a *kataphysic* and Gospel/revelation-founded theology. This book insists that Torrance's theological methodology could not but affect his soteriological formulation. Chapter 1 thus discusses the interrelation of Torrance's scientific theology, evangelical theology, and trinitarian soteriology. Then, following Torrance's gospel-oriented starting point, chapter 2 begins to explore the Person and work of Christ in the economy of salvation, followed by two chapters on the Persons and works of the Father and the Holy Spirit, respectively. This sketch follows the Pauline benediction formula "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13:14), which for Torrance "constitute[s] the Trinitarian structure of all Christian faith and life."¹¹ This is what makes Torrance's theology *evangelical*: it considers the whole Triune God revealed in the salvific economy and follows the revealed trinitarian *taxis* of the salvific economy. Finally, chapter 5 articulates the nature and shape of our salvation in light of the being of God as communion mediating reconciliation in the world. It will be argued that just as the origin of salvation is a communion of love, so the *telos* of salvation is participation in the life and love of the Triune God.

11. Torrance, "Crisis in the Kirk," 21–22; and *School of Faith*, xxi.

Scientific, Evangelical, and Trinitarian Soteriology

Almighty God, who hast given us thine only begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin: Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with thee and the same Spirit ever one God, world without end.¹

IN DANIEL HARDY'S EVALUATION, IN RESPECT TO CONTENT AND FORM, Torrance's theology is both *declarative* and *relational*. First, it is declarative because it determines and demonstrates core Christian doctrines as they developed through the history of the church, particularly in relation to the patristic conciliar declarations on the doctrine of the Trinity. Evidence is found in his conspicuous preoccupation with the doctrinal formulations of Athanasius and the Reformation in his writings. In this sense, Torrance's theology is more analytic than constructive, but it is false to assume that Torrance possesses no originality.² His recurrent recourse to historical theology is apologetic, in that he seeks to show that his theology is grounded upon and is an exposition of creedal beliefs. Furthermore, as T. A. Noble writes, Torrance approaches classical theologians "as a 'historical theologian' interested in the profound convergence of thought, rather than as a 'theological historian' concerned with cultural relativities."³ Secondly, his theology is relational because it is not only integrative, but also unique.⁴ A theological glue holds together Torrance's over six hundred

1. B43 Untitled sermon on Matthew 1:18–25, 3.

2. John Webster thinks of Torrance as a performer, not a composer, and refers to him as "the British *resourcement* theologian," in "Editorial: T. F. Torrance," 370.

3. Noble, "Thomas Forsyth Torrance," 824.

4. Hardy, "T. F. Torrance," 165–67.

Communion with the Triune God

published materials, and makes the several interrelated themes and aspects within them consistent and coherent. This is why an introductory presentation of other aspects of his thought is necessary for us to understand his trinitarian soteriology. There are two important aspects in particular: (1) scientific theology, and (2) evangelical theology. Torrance admits that the nature of trinitarian theology requires a circular procedure in presentation, but adds that this does not imply “operating with a vicious cycle, begging the question, or falling into the fallacy of a *petitio principii*.”⁵ Rather, this procedure actually prevents theologizing from moving outside of its own theo-logic, or arguing from some starting point of our own choosing through which theological truths may be judged or validated.

Scientific Theology and the Trinity

Torrance ranks among a few recent theologians whose interest in science overlaps and influences their theology. In Torrance’s case, the awareness came early. Upon Hugh Ross Mackintosh’s introduction of the theology of Barth to him in 1935, and his consequent reading of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* I/1, Torrance was “immensely exhilarated by the insight of Barth . . . and by his presentation of dogmatics as a science.”⁶ Equally enlightening to him was Barth’s scientific-trinitarian theology, as also manifest in the creeds. Torrance was immediately convinced that any serious scientific attempt at knowledge should be governed by the given data. In the case of theology, therefore, theologizing should be governed by the self-revelation of God as recorded in the Scriptures, and particularly by the self-manifestation of God in history in the incarnate Son and the Holy Spirit. As will be seen later, this has profound consequences in Torrance’s trinitarian soteriology.

General Relationship between Science and Theology

Torrance acknowledges the animosity between the church and the sciences, and his attempt to reconcile these two often bifurcated fields is

5. Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 27. In a circular manner, Torrance employs Claude Welch’s two approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity, *synthetic* and *basic*, or summative and starting point. See *In This Name*, 47–48.

6. Torrance, *Karl Barth*, 121. Stephen D. Wigley argues that Torrance’s concern for theological science has its origin in an Anselmian epistemology, and also through Barth’s influence, in “Karl Barth on St. Anselm,” 79–97.

primarily apologetic.⁷ Firstly, he shows scientists that theology is a science in its own right; and secondly, which comprises the larger part, he enlightens the church that science and theology inform one another, and that science is not inherently an enemy of the Christian truth. Torrance even asserts that thinking about the interrelation of theological and natural sciences is a part of the calling of both Christians and scientists.⁸ The church's hostile disposition against science and its agenda, Torrance states, is grounded upon false and obsolete presuppositions. The idea that science is an enemy of the Christian faith, he optimistically proclaims, is no longer true. Modern science's arrogant superiority complex has already been abandoned by contemporary science. Forced by the very advances of science itself, scientists are beginning to realize the boundaries of natural investigation and the futility of the modern agenda for a methodological secularization. Since natural science is concerned not simply with the convenient arrangements of observational data which can be generalized into universal explanatory forms, but with the intrinsic structures of the universe, the relation of the universe to God seems to be steadily forced on scientists by their own limitations to explain certain events and principles. This is encapsulated by Albert Einstein's redefinition of physics: "a finite but unbounded universe with open, dynamic structures grounded in a depth of objectivity and intelligibility which commands and transcends our comprehension."⁹

Secondly, the church is appropriating an outdated science. Torrance asserts that science has already moved on, but the church has failed to recognize it. This unawareness on the part of the church portrays her inability to take on the challenge of keeping up-to-date with new discoveries and trends. Torrance's favorite example is the obsolete dualist frame of thought that still pervades theology today. Augustinian and Thomist dualism should now be replaced by a holistic framework, just as Newton's dualistic and mechanistic concept of the universe has already been discarded by science in favor of Einstein's unitary and integrative outlook. Indeed, as Torrance desires, the church should undergo a "conceptual surgery,"

7. Langford, "T. F. Torrance's *Theological Science*," 157. See also Pannenberg, "Problems between Science and Theology," 105–12. Pannenberg argues that it is misleading to speak of warfare between science and Christian theology as if it was on a grand scale.

8. Torrance, *Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 7. In particular, Torrance comments: "Theology cannot operate on its proper ground in complete detachment from cosmology," in *Divine and Contingent Order*, 63–65.

9. Quoted in Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 11.

where old patterns of thought should be changed.¹⁰ When this happens, one great benefit will be “a profounder grasp of the created or contingent order within which both natural and theological science have to operate and to cooperate in fidelity to the nature of the universe that God has made.”¹¹

Scientific Methodology and Theology

Torrance's interest in the dialogue between science and theology goes beyond his desire to appropriate scientific discoveries for theological formulations. Although he exploits the *contents* of scientific investigation, his greatest aspiration is for theology to learn from the *methods* of scientific inquiry, although not in the sense that theology should borrow something new from modern science, but that it should return to the biblical and patristic theological approach. In fact, Torrance laments the divergences of modern theology from the gospel presentation of Christ in both the *method* of how a concept was conceived and the *content* of the same conceived concept. He puts the stronger blame, however, on the erroneous procedure that led to wrong conclusions.¹² That *scientific methodology* constitutes Torrance's main focus is important to note. Frank Schubert argues that Torrance's theological science fails to solve the historically restrained relationship between science and religion, but this reflects his misunderstanding of Torrance, because nowhere does Torrance say that his intention is to resolve fully the tension between the two.¹³ In fact, Torrance argues that similarity and distinction between science and theology should be maintained. The similarity lies in the mode of inquiry, in that the objects of investigation are studied according to their own intrinsic nature and rational structure, allowing them to reveal and speak for themselves. The difference lies in the approach. Torrance was suspicious of any notion of a *scientia universalis*, a universal principle or methodology applicable to all experimentations.¹⁴ It is necessary for each field of inquiry to develop its own distinctive methods that are faithful to and in accordance

10. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 148, 154.

11. Torrance, *Christian Theology*, 22. See also Neidhardt, “Torrance's Integration of Judeo-Christian Theology and Natural Science,” 87–98.

12. B23 “The Doctrine of God in Traditional Theology,” 1.

13. Schubert, “Thomas F. Torrance,” 123–37.

14. Torrance critiques Descartes's vision of a *scientia universalis* applied to all *scientiae speciales* as illogical and inappropriate. See also Torrance's discussion of general and special sciences in *Theological Science*, 106–31.

with the nature of the object of its investigation. Thus, for instance, it is illogical to study a frog using the experimental apparatus employed in astronomy. Torrance identifies the similarity and dissimilarity in terms of *formal* scientific procedure and *material* scientific procedure.¹⁵ That the majority of scientists are wary of granting Torrance's argument consideration (as Schubert narrates) is most probably due to Torrance's insistence that theology is a science in its own right.

KATA PHYSIN AND SCIENTIFIC QUESTIONING

Torrance understands and uses "science" in terms of the German *Wissenschaft*, or "a rigorous and disciplined inquiry of the object according to its unique nature," and argues that this approach is not unique to the natural sciences, but was actually employed in the early Alexandrian tradition, in which Athanasius stood. According to Torrance, Alexandria, influenced by the developing Greek science, espoused an investigative procedure in strict accordance with the nature of the reality under scrutiny, or *kata physin*, which is also "to know things . . . in accordance with their truth or reality (*kat' aletheian*) and thus to think and speak truly (*alethos*) of them."¹⁶ Thus, *kata physin* requires that theologians begin a discussion of the knowledge of God by looking at God himself. "If we are to have any true and precise scientific knowledge of God, we must allow his own nature, as he comes revealed to us, to determine how we are to know him, how we are to think of him, and what we are to say of him."¹⁷ This is what Torrance refers to as the "ethical dimension" of knowing and the *dogmatics* he wishes theology to employ, in contrast to what he rejects as undisciplined free thinking.¹⁸ In terms of methodology, like Barth, Torrance rejects the notion that we can develop an account of *how* we know apart

15. Torrance, *Theological Science*, 112–13.

16. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 51; *Theological Science*, 116; *Divine Meaning*, 180. Concerning the scientific atmosphere in early Alexandria, see Torrance, "Alexandrian Theology," 185–89.

17. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 52.

18. Torrance, "The Transcendental Role of Wisdom in Science," 139–40; "Reformed Dogmatics, not Dogmatism," 152–56. Rather than free thinking, we must accommodate our rationality to the object of our investigation. Torrance actually blames "free thinking" as the author of secularism, in B41 "The Secularization of the Church." In his sermons, Torrance uses the analogy of accommodating our vision to what appears in front of us. See B42 "Moses wist not that the skin of His face," 4; and B44 "Watchers at the Cross," 1–7. See also Marianne H. Micks, who understands theology as a disciplined thinking about God in *Introduction to Theology*, xiii.

from our actual knowledge and its material content.¹⁹ To start speculating on the doctrine of God apart from the givenness of God's revelation, Torrance says, follows Arius's *mythological* thinking, or "thinking from a subjective centre in ourselves, in which we project our fabricated patterns and ideas upon the divine Reality and will accept only what we can conceive in terms of what we already know or what fits in with our own prior self-understanding."²⁰

To know things in accordance with their nature requires a proper questioning procedure. This is because "genuine questioning leads to the disclosure and recognition of the Truth in its objective Reality, in its own Majesty and Sanctity and Authority, which cannot be dragged down within our dividing and compounding dialectic in order to be controlled by us."²¹ Torrance honors Lorenzo Valla as the one who re-introduced the new kind of inquiry that is most suitable for scientific theology, in which there is an interrogative, rather than a problematic form of inquisition. This is the change from *quaestio* to *interrogatio*.²² Like Calvin, Torrance prefers the latter because it is "a mode of inquiry in which questions yield results that are entirely new, giving rise to knowledge that we cannot derive by an inferential process from what we already know."²³ Truth is known through revelation, or through a "disclosure method,"²⁴ and is apprehended through the mind's obedience and submission to the given

19. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, ix.

20. Torrance, *God and Rationality*, 46; *Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 114–17. This is what he also calls "the disease of imagination," in B42 "Aaron's Calf," 5. With sarcasm, he writes: "Take the theologian—his use of logic, as though you can understand God's ways by a rule from the human mind! Take the ecclesiastic, who tries to organize the Kingdom of God—might as well try to make the ocean run in particular grooves and channels!" See B44 "The Story of Jairus," 4.

21. See B39 "At the ninth hour Jesus," 5; and similar sermon B42 "My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?"

22. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, 267; *God and Rationality*, 33–35. Valla borrowed the process from the Stoics and from Cicero. See Torrance, "The Historical Jesus," 512. Torrance argues that the nature of true theological questioning, however, does not employ the Cartesian approach of beginning from doubt. Torrance explains that doubting is focused on the self, while theological questioning is directed to the other. See B39 "At the ninth hour," 8.

23. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, 268.

24. Achtemeier, "The Truth of Tradition," 355; Morrison, "Torrance's Critique of Evangelical Orthodoxy," 54. In his other article "Heidegger, Correspondence Truth and the Realist Theology of T. F. Torrance," 139–55, Morrison argues that Torrance is indebted to or at least has appropriated Heidegger's assertion of the priority of truth as disclosure over truth as correspondence.

data. Ho argues that this epistemological procedure constitutes a key weakness in Torrance's revelational theology, because it proposes a non-inferential knowledge of God and consequently downgrades humanity's reasoning capability. Ho understands Torrance's emphasis on the objectivity of the object and humanity's obedient response to imply humanity's passive reception, which for Ho is more fideistic than scientific. Following Jason Yeung, Ho thus confidently concludes that "Torrance's theological science is simply another fancy name for a personal belief which is totally independent of science."²⁵ Ho's harsh critique here is but one of the many theological criticisms he has of Torrance, and actually reveals his one-sided reading of Torrance. Firstly, Ho conveniently skips Torrance's argument that the *interrogatio* mode of questioning actually enables the knower to be actively self-critical, because it allows what we already know or hold as knowledge to be called in question by the object.²⁶ Secondly, Ho misses the whole point of Torrance's balance between scientific objectivity and subjectivity, to which we now turn.

SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

One of Torrance's major concerns was for theology to begin with and be grounded upon objective reality, not some antecedent external presupposition imposed upon reality. Continuing on Barth's theological mission, he consciously combats residues of Descartes's "return to the subject" philosophy, Kantian transcendental *a priorism*, and liberal subjectivism in theology, and uncompromisingly asserts that an important constituent of a scientific theology is "devotion to its proper object, sheer respect for objectivity."²⁷ The compelling evidence given by the objective content of reality should govern theology, and theology should begin with an objective reference which is always outward looking—away from the self to a focus on the other reality. This is what Torrance calls "*a theological way of thinking*, not from a centre in ourselves but from a centre in God, not

25. Ho, *A Critical Study*, 24–25, 29, 232–33, 236–38, 274.

26. Torrance, *Theological Science*, 120–23; *Theology in Reconstruction*, 67. See also Neidhardt's defense of Torrance's disclosure analogy in "Reflections on Remarks of David F. Siemens, Jr.," 114. Siemens also critiques Torrance's preference for auditory epistemology, in "Two Problems with Torrance," 112–13.

27. Torrance, *Theological Science*, 116; *Belief in Science*, 95; Langford, "Torrance's *Theological Science*," 159. As such, both *Barth: Introduction* (1962) and *Karl Barth* (1990) are not only about Barth's theology, but about aspects that Torrance gleaned from him.