

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.

Communion with the Triune God

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.

Communion with the Triune God

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.

Communion with the Triune God

from axiomatic assumptions which we make but from a frame of reference that derives from God Himself through His Word.”²⁸ As A. E. Taylor argued, authority lies “in a reality that is wholly given and transubjective, and simply and absolutely authoritative through its givenness,”²⁹ not in the experimental methodology the scientist or theologian invents. Furthermore, this controlling given is not constructed but is received. Torrance’s rejection of subjectivism in theology is not only intellectually propelled, as if the issue is contained only in the academy. Rather, he was also concerned that the obsession for self-consciousness, or for “the egocentric I” is actually morally unbecoming for a Christian thinker. Simply put, the maturing Christian must be able to distinguish his presuppositions from the objective reality, in contrast to the immature Christian who is in “stuck adolescence, an adolescence that somehow perseveres in the egocentric direction without breaking into maturity and manhood.”³⁰ This “diseased form of religion,” Torrance continues, is the “inability to live outside of himself and to consider the ‘thou.’”³¹ For Torrance, this self-centeredness is the road to hell, for “whatever hell may be, certainly the hell of it must be to be shut up in yourself, finally to be incarcerated in your own meaninglessness and boredom, to be locked up in yourself for ever and ever.”³²

28. Torrance, *Theological Science*, 281 (italics mine). What should be avoided is the “Hellenization” or “Eurocentricization of Christianity.” See Torrance, “Being of One Substance with the Father,” in *Nicene Christianity*, 50; and on the history of Protestant theology’s lapse into this feared Eurocentricization, see Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology* (1985). Torrance also refers to this as the “Subjectivization of Christianity,” in “Hermeneutics According to Schleiermacher,” 263–65. But this does not mean that the Christianization of Hellenism that Torrance advocates is completed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. See Torrance, *Ecumenical Studies*, 73–76. It is rather incomplete as Robert Jenson argues in “Second Locus: The Triune God,” esp. 118f. on “The Initial Christianization of Hellenism”; and Schwöbel, “Christology and Trinitarian Thought,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, 115. Interestingly, Jenson adds that although the Western church has struggled with Hellenic theology through the ages, he argues that “so long as the Western church endures, it must be Hellenic,” in *The Triune Identity*, 161.

29. Torrance, *Theological Science*, viii. See Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, 241.

30. B36 “The Heart of the Matter,” 2.

31. Ibid. This “false principle” of being inward-looking, Torrance says in another sermon, should be replaced by an “Archimedean point outside of ourselves . . . that can come only from Jesus.” See B39 Untitled sermon on 2 Corinthians 8:9, 3.

32. B36 “The Heart of the Matter,” 4. The solution to this problem is only found in Christ, who alone “can break into the closed circle of human selfishness and bend man’s will until it becomes straight and points beyond itself to complete fulfilment in the purposes of God,” in B38 Untitled sermon on Isaiah 21:11–12, 8.

But “why the massive, redundant, and presumptuous assertion of the actuality of the Object of theological inquiry, God Himself?” Donald Klinefelter asks.³³ Ho follows Klinefelter’s critique that Torrance’s optimism for receptive knowledge in particular and Torrance’s theological science in general are founded on a few implicit and explicit presuppositions or ultimate beliefs that are above verification by any other field of inquiry, which is also why Ronald Thiemann and Douglas Morrison see theological foundationalism in Torrance.³⁴ In all these critiques, the general tenor is that even knowledge of God should be validated by an accepted universal canon of truth. Objectivity is measured by verifiability, and anything beyond proof is considered subjective understanding. Thus, Klinefelter could say that Torrance’s use of science and philosophy, “rather than supporting an advance to new theological frontiers . . . serve instead as bulwarks protecting a sophisticated Barthian fideism.”³⁵ It is true that Torrance does not provide evidence for the validity of the presumption that God has revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth using philosophical apparatuses of verification. Torrance’s defence is that objectivity in theology and the validity of its claims should be measured not by canons of truth derived from philosophy or any other field, but from theology itself. Even in the articulation of theological truths, Torrance argues, the use of philosophical apparatuses is unnecessary. Because all special sciences should develop their own investigative procedures to discern objective truths, so does theology have its *theo-logical* procedure, that is, that objectivity should be measured through the “logic of grace.”³⁶

The central thesis of Torrance’s argument is simple: objective reality and self-evidence are given priority over all precedent knowledge or

33. Klinefelter, “God and Rationality,” 123.

34. Ho, *A Critical Study*, 26–29. Achtemeier adds that the objectivity of God as God is “an indispensable presupposition,” in “The Truth of Tradition,” 355. See the basis of Ho’s critique in Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, 191–208. See also Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, 40; and Morrison, *Knowledge of the Self-revealing God*, 65–68. Thiemann argues for a non-foundationalist approach: “narrated promise.” See McCall’s illuminating discussion in “Thiemann, Torrance and Epistemological Doctrines of Revelation,” 148–68. McCall concludes that Torrance offers a much more coherent epistemology than Thiemann, although he thinks that Torrance has a “modern foundationalism.”

35. Klinefelter, “God and Rationality,” 128.

36. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 37–41; *Theological Science*, 12–33. Although Torrance is appreciative of the early Fathers, he thinks that the early Christian apologists wrongly used philosophy and blames them for the beginning of the “baptism of paganism” to Christianity. See B23 “The Doctrine of God in Traditional Theology,” 5.

Communion with the Triune God

opinion, although Torrance also realizes that an anthropological element is inescapably present in every human endeavor, including theology. Theology remains the discourse of God about himself with humanity as active recipient and interpreter. But the subjectivity that Torrance recognizes is different from that of the subjective *a priorism* which he strongly repudiates, i.e., subjectivism. Critical here is the difference between subjective *starting point* and subjective *participation*. The former refers to the procedure of approaching reality with fixed presuppositions, opinions, and sets of standards to quantify or qualify data. The latter, on the other hand, gives priority to the reality under investigation, but considers the personal element involved. Participatory subjectivity, therefore, refers to the realization that a personal engagement is necessary in order to acquire knowledge of another reality. Torrance redefines *objectivity* and *subjectivity*. Contrary to the claims of old science for a detached experimentation which aims to exclude from scientific knowledge all subjective bias and prejudice so that it can be genuinely objective, Torrance argues:

It must not be forgotten that only a person is capable of self-criticism and of distinguishing what he knows from his subjective states, and therefore of appreciating the bearing of human thought upon experience. In fact, it is only a person who can engage truly in objective and scientific operations . . . any scientific inquiry pursued in a detached, impersonal, formalistic way isolates itself from man's higher faculties and thereby restricts its range and power of insight and understanding.³⁷

In sum, precisely because ontological openness to reality is an essential ingredient in the objectivity of a scientific theory, it “inevitably throws the maintenance and fulfillment of objectivity back upon the personal responsibility of the scientist himself: he and he only is capable, as an active centre of rationality, of establishing the bearing of his knowing upon reality in this way.”³⁸ It is here that Michael Polanyi, James Clerk Maxwell, and Einstein have their important bearings on Torrance's scientific theology. Among the three, it was Polanyi, however, who brought to prominence the particular point of restoring to rigorous scientific activity what he called “the personal coefficient of knowledge” and the centrality of “ultimate beliefs or normative insights.”³⁹

37. Torrance, *Christian Theology*, 61–62.

38. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, 115.

39. Torrance, *Christian Theology*, 61–71; *Belief in Science*, 1–27; “Ultimate and Penultimate Beliefs in Science,” 151–76; and *Theology in Reconstruction*, 69–72.

Scientific Theology and Trinitarian Thinking

Scientific theology—in which the nature and being of God take priority and authoritative control—is inevitably trinitarian. Torrance must have realized this upon reading Barth's *Dogmatics* I/1, because the volume exemplifies what scientific theology should look like. Torrance admits the insights he gained from Barth's scientific approach in the volume, but even more gripping for him was how Barth accomplished his scientific theology in structuring the book's contents in explicit trinitarian style.⁴⁰

STRATIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The circular relationship between scientific theology and trinitarian theology becomes more apparent in Torrance's appropriation of Einstein's and Polanyi's hierarchical epistemology. In a realist account of knowing, conceptual knowledge arises from the ground level of human intuitive apprehension of reality, as characteristic of all *a posteriori* investigation. Then from the tacit, experiential level of knowledge, there comes a conceptual advance to another level, although the advance is not a movement away from concrete reality, but a progressive and deepening apprehension of reality.⁴¹ Formalized knowledge remains coordinated with the basic experience of reality. In theology, Torrance writes:

Formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity develops a stratified structure arising on the ground of our evangelical experience, knowledge and worship of God in the life of the Church, deriving from the historical revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit mediated to us in the incarnate life and work of Jesus Christ, and directed to the transcendental mystery of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as he is in his one eternal being.⁴²

Polanyi has shown Torrance that positivist and objectivist philosophies of science are inadequate since they try to establish the objective validity of science on impersonal grounds. See Thorson, "Scientific Objectivity and the Listening Attitude," 61; and for an extensive treatment of Polanyi's influence on Torrance, see Weightman, *Theology in a Polanyian Universe* (1994).

40. Torrance, *Karl Barth*, 121.

41. Torrance, *Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 34–35, 156–72; *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 131–36; *God and Rationality*, 83; *Christian Theology*, 37; *Divine and Contingent Order*, 20; and *Transformation and Convergence*, 159.

42. Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 83; *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 136, 140.

Communion with the Triune God

Torrance calls this “Chalcedonism,” because the creedal formulations of both Nicea and Chalcedon exemplified a rise to a higher level of knowledge. Borrowing from Einstein’s *Physics and Reality*, Torrance describes this Chalcedonian hierarchical model of knowing in three ascending orders.⁴³

The level of personal encounter with Jesus Christ in worship and fellowship in the church represents the first level of theological knowledge: what Torrance calls the “*evangelical and doxological level*.”⁴⁴ Torrance acknowledges Polanyi’s direct influence on his understanding of this level, particularly his discussion of the tacit or inarticulate dimension in human thought.⁴⁵ Like the experience of the early church, in this level, an implicit awareness of the threefold act of God expressed in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is imprinted in the Christian psyche: “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” However, while such a trinitarian awareness is present at this stage, the focal point of the *evangelical level* is “personal encounter with Jesus Christ within the structures and rationalities of our historical existence in space and time . . . where we are summoned to live and think not out of a centre in ourselves but out of a centre in the Lord Jesus.”⁴⁶ This *incipient theology*, as Torrance also calls it, although involving no speculative or logical analysis, remains as “the *sine qua non* of the other levels of doctrinal formulation.”⁴⁷

Thomas A. Noble, however, discerns an apparent inconsistency in Torrance’s view of the evangelical level, especially because Torrance argues that explicit conceptualization and theoretical understanding only proceed at the second level of knowledge: the *scientific or theological level*.⁴⁸ The problem is that a completely unconceptual knowledge at the first level seems to contradict the fact that the Christ we encounter in our evangelical experience is “Christ clothed with his gospel,”⁴⁹ and that revelation is

43. Torrance, *Belief in Science*, 104–6; *Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 156–59. Torrance considers Einstein as a “disguised theologian,” in *Theological and Natural Science*, 17.

44. Torrance, *Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 156; *Christian Doctrine of God*, 88.

45. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 132. See also Myers, “The Stratification of Knowledge,” 6.

46. Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 88.

47. *Ibid.*, 90.

48. Private conversation with T. A. Noble, 20 May 2011; Myers, “Stratification of Knowledge,” 7.

49. Torrance, *School of Faith*, lxxx; *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 9. We know

always in and through the eloquent Word in his self-communication. Because our knowledge of God is also always *a posteriori*—achieved through an encounter with the self-revealing Christ—then our knowledge is not merely tacit or unthematic, but is to a certain degree already conceptual. If the tacit dimension is to be truly a *prolepsis*, or “a forward leap of the awakened mind in laying hold of some aspect of reality,”⁵⁰ then a conceptual understanding, limited it may be, should be present already. Moreover, one should not forget that the gospel we receive today is the gospel as it was already conceptually articulated by the apostles and biblical writers. It may be that Torrance’s desire to categorize neatly the three levels of knowledge led him to dwell on their differences from one another, without giving sufficient space for an elaboration of and about the overlapping intersections between the levels. It would be evangelically more accurate to say that even in the first level of knowledge, an articulate knowledge is already achieved, although not as explicitly or astutely as that which is achieved in the second level, where a movement of penetration into the logical relation between the reality-in-itself and the reality as it is experienced in space and time is reached. Torrance argues that this process requires the invention of theoretical tools and concepts, which should (1) be grounded upon the tacit experience of reality, and (2) function as freely chosen “fluid axioms” that are open to revision in the light of further discoveries.⁵¹

According to Torrance, the movement from the evangelical to the theological level of knowledge is the attempt to “apprehend more fully the economic and ontological and trinitarian structure of God’s revealing and saving acts in Jesus Christ as they are presented to us in the Gospel.”⁵² As we experience God in worship and in our daily lives, we become aware of the threefold movement of God’s revealing and saving nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit underlying all our Christian experiences, enabling us to speak of the economic Trinity. As such, early creedal formulations represent an example of the ascent from the first to the second level of knowledge. Torrance particularly refers to the development of the all-important concept *homoousios* to give expression to the reality which the

Christ as the Savior: “We know Jesus Christ by what He has done for us. It is by His works that we know his Person. If Christ has not saved you and dealt with your sin and guilt by his Cross, then you don’t know Him,” in B46 Untitled sermon on 1 Corinthians 2:2, 7.

50. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 84.

51. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, 49–51; *Reality and Scientific Theology*, 77–78.

52. Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 91.

Communion with the Triune God

early fathers had grasped intuitively with God through Jesus Christ. In their personal union and communion with Jesus Christ, the Nicene fathers knew themselves that they had entered into union and communion with the very being of God.⁵³

Finally, building upon the progression from the first to the second level of knowledge, we move from an awareness of the Trinity *ad extra* to the Trinity *ad intra*, which Torrance calls the *metascientific or metatheological level* of knowledge. It is here that “we discern the Trinitarian relations immanent in God himself which lie behind, and are the ground of the relations of, the Economic Trinity—that is, we are lifted up in thought to the level of ‘the Ontological Trinity’ or ‘the Immanent Trinity,’ as it is variously called.”⁵⁴ Arrival at this level, Torrance describes, is the arrival at the “ultimate theoretic structure,” not because of its superficial abstractive speculation, but because of its logical economy and simplicity.⁵⁵ This level of refined conceptualization is “the supreme point in our knowing of God in the inner perichoretic relations of his triune Being,” primarily because the perichoretic relations are “the ultimate constitutive relations in God,” and as such also constitute “the ground upon which the intelligibility and objectivity of all our knowledge of God finally repose.”⁵⁶

TRINITY AS NATURE AND BEING OF GOD

Torrance’s stratification of theological knowledge using scientific investigation ends up with the doctrine of the Trinity *in se* as the nature and

53. Torrance, *Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 157; Myers, “Stratification,” 9. See also *Christian Doctrine of God*, 93–102, on the centrality of the *homoousion* in the stratification of knowledge.

54. Torrance, *Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 158.

55. *Ibid.*, 171–72.

56. Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 103, 107. As Noble suggests (Private conversation, 27 July 2011), Torrance’s stratification of knowledge, owing perhaps to his dedication to the Nicene formulation, possesses a certain chronological ambiguity. Because Torrance points to the Nicene *homoousion* as the moment of ascent from the first to the second level, the question of when the third level of knowledge is achieved remains unanswered. Torrance hints that the ascent from the theological to the meta-theological level happens around the Nicene-Constantinopolitan period, but Torrance does not say more or make it clear. Noble’s suggestions that the assent to the second level (the economic Trinity) was achieved as early as the second century by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, and that the assent to the third level (the immanent Trinity) occurred during the Nicene-Constantinopolitan period through Athanasius and the Cappadocians, offer a better chronological explanation of the stratification of knowledge.

being of God. He believes that this stratified structure of knowing, using an inductive bottom-to-top pyramidal paradigm, enables him to enter into the inner cohesion of the evangelical narratives deeply in a way that was not possible before.⁵⁷ In Christian theology, there would be no greater theological articulation that could be claimed as scientific truth beyond the ontological Trinity. The interrelation between scientific theology and the doctrine of the Trinity is therefore irreversible. The circular interconnectedness may be expressed as several movements within one act of knowing. Firstly, a faithful and rigorous scientific theology should be undertaken *kata physin*, according to the nature of the object of investigation. Since theology is primarily a discourse on God, the being of God becomes the unquestionable starting point and controlling center. The question, however, is: “Who is God”? or “What is the nature of God”? It is here, secondly, that scientific theology, through the stratification of knowledge, is particularly helpful. A multi-leveled view of reality, accompanied by an ascending hierarchical order of knowing, reveals that the nature of God is triune. In one sense, the doctrine of the Trinity is to be seen as the culmination of a scientific theology. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity, of the being who God is in himself, constitutes the “ground and grammar of theology.”⁵⁸ Thirdly, while the Trinity *ad intra*, or the perichoretic relations, forms the basis of all theological reflections, a faithful scientific investigation does not do away with the data found in the evangelical level of knowledge. In fact, a continuous retrospective return to the evangelical data and the theoretical constructs based on them is necessary. This means that the centrality of Christ, and the fundamentality of the concepts *homoousios* and *hypostatic union* should always be referred to. This is one of the reasons why Torrance claimed that the use of scientific theology carries with it an evangelical thrust.⁵⁹

57. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, 94–95.

58. This Torrance dictum is also his response, following Barth, to the neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity in modern theology that Rahner brought to the awareness of the church in *The Trinity*, 10–15. For the history of this neglect, see Welch, *In This Name*, esp. chapters 1 and 2. Because of this neglect, Timothy Lull asserts that “the doctrine of the Trinity should be subtitled the guilt-producing doctrine,” in “The Trinity in Recent Theological Literature,” 61.

59. Torrance, *God and Rationality*, viii.